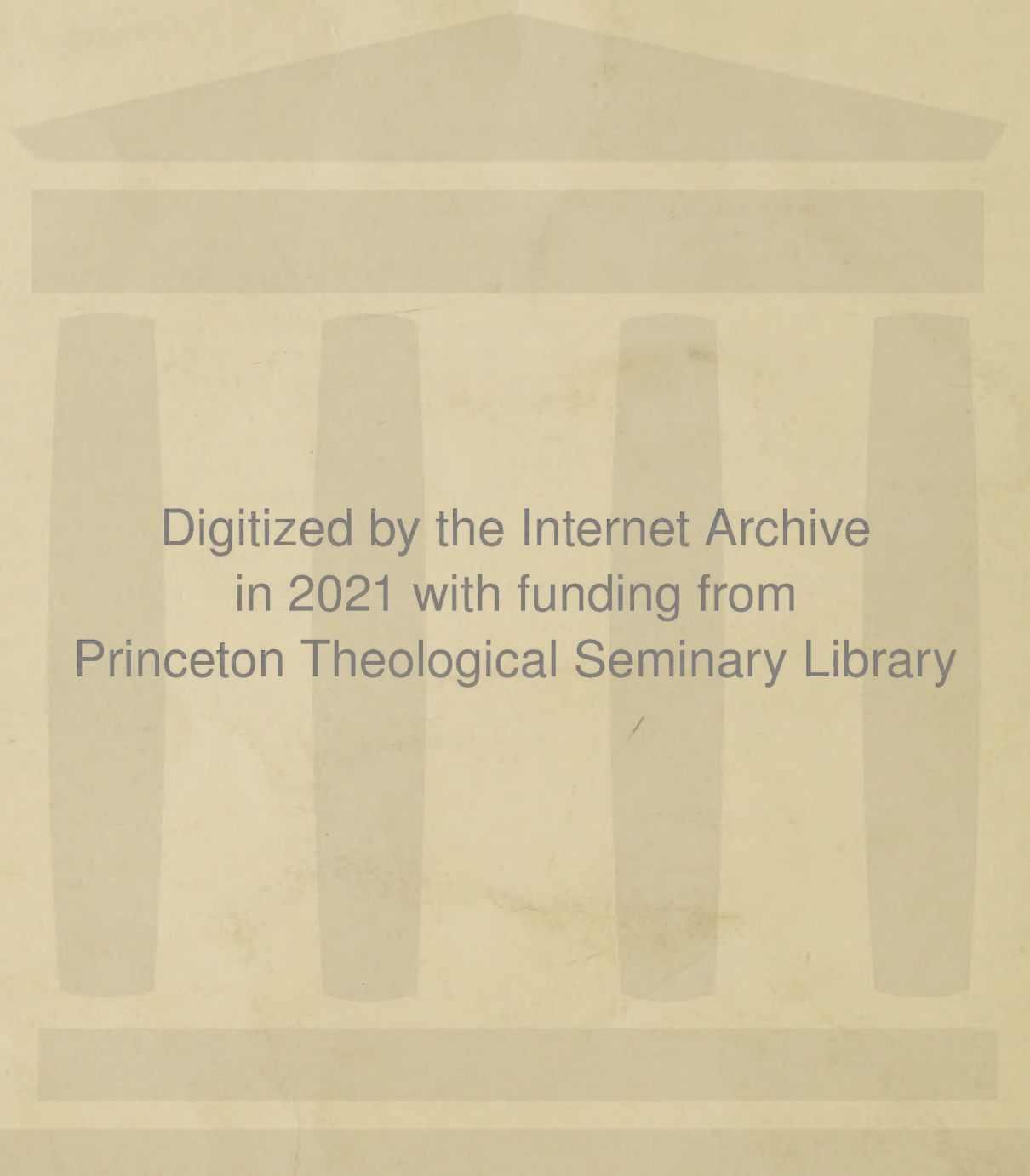


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that the light of God's truth may shine bright and increase

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*Stand at the crossroads and look
Ask for the old paths, where the good way is
Walk in it, and find rest for your souls*

JEREMIAH 6:16

The Princeton Theological Review

Dedicated to the Rev. Dr. Charles Hodge (1797-1878)

Professor of Systematic Theology, Princeton Theological Seminary

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1. All manuscripts (except book reviews) should be addressed to the General Editor.
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5. The typical length of an article should be between 2000 and 6000 words. This word limit is not etched in stone.
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From the Editors

An Apology

The editors wish to apologize to the contributors of the book *Homosexuality and the Christian Community* for a statement in the review of this book that appeared in the May 1996 issue of the PTR (p. 22). In the judgment of the editors this statement constituted an uncharitable *ad hominem* attack on the character of the contributors. This book review went through extensive editorial revisions. Although the statement in question, as well as others, were slated for deletion by the editors, regrettable complications (including several computers that were not being updated in sync, several diskettes with various versions of the book review, and a very late night) resulted in the mistaken printing of the penultimate draft of the book review. The editors have since instituted policy changes at the PTR to prevent any such recurrence. We sincerely regret our error.

Whither the Church? Whither Princeton Theological Seminary?

Those endowed with the spiritual gift of prophecy are adept at discerning the hand of the Spirit in current events in the life of the Church. The editors do not assume this mantel. But there are some interesting data which suggest themselves. Their significance is not self-evident, but they do seem to have the imprint of a divine work. Just what that is, we will leave to the readers to discern. Nevertheless, we would like to provide a few interesting institutional facts concerning theological institutions in the US, as grist for those prophetic mills.

There is clearly an institutional shift underway that either presages or perhaps reflects a change in the make up of the American church. PTS finds itself in the middle of this change.

Consider the following statistics concerning theological seminaries culled from the *Fact Book on Theological Education* (1994-95). If one counts the total size of student body, including full and part-time students, the largest ten seminaries in the United States are Protestant Evangelical:

1. Southwestern Baptist - 3254
2. Fuller - 2898
3. New Orleans Baptist - 2483
4. Southern Baptist - 1770
5. Trinity Evangelical - 1529
6. Dallas Theological Seminary- 1358
7. Gordon-Conwell - 971
8. Reformed - 970
9. Asbury - 969
10. Golden Gate Baptist - 936

The rankings change slightly if we consider only full time students:

1. Southwestern Baptist - 2391
2. Fuller - 2035
3. Trinity Evangelical - 1329
4. New Orleans Baptist - 1267
5. Southern Baptist - 1259
6. Dallas - 821
7. Princeton - 798
8. Reformed - 784
9. Asbury - 737
10. Luther (MN) - 688

Counting only full time students, Princeton ranks as one of the ten largest. Eight of the ten largest seminaries are evangelical. Two are identified with what are traditionally regarded as mainline denominations (Princeton and Luther); although, at least Princeton has a significant diversity of denominational backgrounds and theological orientations represented in the student body (and to a lesser extent among faculty).

Developments in the last two years indicate this trend is continuing. In fact, some evangelical seminaries have grown exponentially. From 1988 to 1994, Westminster has had a 54% growth, Reformed Theological Seminary has had a 165% growth, and Covenant Seminary has had a 236% growth. These are all conservative Reformed institutions. 1996 numbers for Reformed Theological Seminary are just under 1300 students—for an institution only thirty years old.

Interestingly, there is little correlation between the size of a seminary's endowment, and the size of its student body. In fact, many institutions with relatively small endowments nevertheless have sizable student bodies. This likely indicates that students at such institutions submit to a harsher financial burden than those who attend better endowed seminaries. So the growth in young and meagerly endowed seminaries is doubly astonishing.

Five of the ten wealthiest seminaries are Presbyterian (USA). But only one, Princeton, has an enrollment size in the top ten:

1. Princeton - \$488 million
2. Harvard - \$120 million
3. Pittsburgh - \$76 million
4. Union (VA) - \$72 million
5. Asbury - \$68 million
6. Perkins - \$66 million
7. Southwestern Baptist - \$64 million
8. Southern Baptist - \$63 million
8. Protestant Episcopal (VA) - \$63 million
10. Austin Presbyterian - \$60 million
10. Catholic University - \$60 million
10. McCormick - \$60 million

If we exclude entities like the Vatican, Princeton Theological Seminary may just be the wealthiest strictly theological institution in the history of Christendom.

Letters

So what does all this mean? Well, we're not sure. Clearly there are changes afoot. For good or for ill, some theological institutions are likely to go the way of the dodo bird. Of course, the wealthier ones could be self-perpetuating, living off interest from their endowments, even if they had no students.

Others appear just to be emerging. And this trend has a clear theological hue. Analogous tendencies are occurring world wide. The growth of Christianity in places like Africa, Asia, and Latin America is overwhelmingly Protestant Evangelical (see the reference book, *Operation World* for statistics). There do not appear to be mass conversions to the Christianity of the Bultmannian, Tillichian and Marxian variety. These species are more or less reserved for already-converted Christians who have unfortunately lost their way in places like seminary.

An interesting aspect of these developments (from our perspective) is that Princeton Theological Seminary is quite clearly in the middle of these changes, and exhibits characteristics suggesting that it will be around for the long haul. But its place is quite ambiguous. How will the Lord choose to use PTS? Historically, this institution has been a significant participant in the spread of the gospel. The Christian churches in many countries had their beginnings from graduates of PTS. The student volunteer movement began in Princeton. The most influential American theologian, Charles Hodge, is forever identified with it, even if this is an embarrassment to some. But what about today? What about tomorrow? It is apparent that the Lord is raising up young Samuels who arise when they are called to carry on his work. There are also no doubt some Elis, and perhaps even a Hophni and a Phinehas, who gorge themselves on the meat meant for the Lord's sacrifice (1 Samuel 2: 12-18). May all those with ears to hear pray that PTS and other institutions like it might be found, on that final day, in the company of Samuel.

J.W. Richards

Call for Articles & Letters

The PTR seeks substantive, well-reasoned articles on topics of general theological interest. Under this rubric we include theology, philosophy, science, literary theory, history, and indeed any discipline that touches significantly on theology.

There do not appear to be mass conversions to the Christianity of the Bultmannian, Tillichian and Marxian variety

To the Editor:

I should like to clarify a remark I made in the last paragraph of my review of Dr. Seow's book in the May 1996 issue of the *Princeton Theological Review* in which I appear to question the moral integrity of some of the contributors to his book. This remark can be read in such a way as to suggest that I have knowledge of major moral failures in the lives of these nine professors. I should like it to be known that this remark should not be taken to insinuate that I know any of them for certain to have committed any grave moral offenses. If they have, it is known for certain only by themselves and God, not by me. I could not substantiate such charges were I to attempt to bring them. As the matter stands, it would be unjust and uncharitable to allow these professors to remain tarred with the brush of possible or insinuated scandal, when such was not my intent or meaning. If my words suggested such, I regret not having made my point more clear or not omitting it altogether. I repudiate any misreading of my point that would impute scandalous behavior to these professors.

Sincerely,
Brian Arthur Frederick

Dear Charles Hodge Society:

I was very encouraged to find out *The Charles Hodge Society* is alive and kicking at Princeton Seminary. This past year I was accepted and will begin attending fall of 1997. At that time I am hoping to become a member of your illustrious society.

I realize the academics are demanding and the challenge to one's faith is unyielding at Princeton. Your vision, however, will have an incalculable effect on tomorrow's pastors. It is this kind of atmosphere where we as Christians can truly move today's intellectuals as well as those presently in positions of influence to a saving faith in Christ. With your leadership many pastors of the coming era will have a foundation to stand on. They will be able to truly articulate and argue for Biblical authority. This could, perhaps, be one of the stepping stones that will turn the Presbyterian church back to its roots.

[name withheld]

To Whom it may concern:

I have been informed by a friend that the Princeton Theological Review is a buttress to the Christian faith as revealed in the Scriptures, and espoused by the Apostolic Fathers and the historic creeds of the church.

Sincerely,
Lamar J. Hankamp

To the Editors of the PTR:

Thank you so much for your continued scholarly dedication to the Lord and His work in the world. I have found your articles stimulating and challenging, but above all I have appreciated your visible determination to the Bible and a God that is not watered down, based on capricious passions, or politically correct. As I study at what some consider the epicenter of the "Rethinking" conferences, and in the light of those who would battle any notion of the Divine, I am refreshed to know that there are young spirits who keep the faith. You are definitely making Princeton Seminary attractive to me as a prospective student.

[name withheld]

Dear Colleagues:

Your goal to provide a forum for vigorous intellectual discussion is certainly worthy of support. This critical stance, however, should be applied not only to contemporary theological trends but to the so-called "pillars of orthodoxy" as well. It is not helpful to promote particular positions on theological topics as self-evident Protestant or Reformed truths, without giving them an equally critical assessment.

What Charles Hodge has to say about the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture, for instance, cannot be regarded as basic Protestant belief, since it is in clear disagreement with the theology of the Reformation, which maintains that God speaks through the Holy Spirit "where and when God wills" (Augsburg Confession, Art V). The thesis that the written text of the Bible in and through itself speaks infallibly with divine authority was rejected by Luther and Calvin as merely leading to another form of papism (e.g. *Institutes*, Book I, 8,13). Moreover, with regard to the ecclesial context of your publication, it is worth reading the comments of the late Dr. Edwin Rian, himself a staunch anti-liberal for almost twenty years and a co-founder of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, who maintained that "a closed system of doctrine" fosters neither the proclamation of the gospel nor the debate about theological truth (assuming, of course, that there is something to discuss). It can easily lead to an unwarranted attitude of being "on Mount Olympus looking down on the rest of the Christians" (*Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 5, 1984, 222). Besides that, it lends dubious support to the arbitrary use of the Bible for the support of "conservative" values or beliefs, as most letters to the PTR published in the next to last issue have shown.

With best regards,
Matthias Gockel
(Ph.D. candidate in Theology)

Only conviction of the divine truth of the Christian religion can establish and justify the continued existence of Christian churches and therefore of the training of their leaders. Christian theology is not just a cultural discipline. Hence the question arises once again whether theology is right in what it says about God, and by what right it says it.

No truth can be purely subjective . . . My truth cannot be mine alone. If I cannot in principle declare it to be truth for all--though perhaps hardly anyone else sees this--then it pitilessly ceases to be truth for me also.

Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol 1

Hans-Georg Gadamer on Tradition and the Possibility of Understanding

GREGORY E. VALERIANO

Introduction

In his magnum opus, *Truth and Method*, Hans-Georg Gadamer seeks to explore the phenomenon of human understanding. In this explication, Gadamer launches a severe critique of the Enlightenment's epistemological project which sought an ahistorical and objective framework for determining truth. Gadamer argues that the Enlightenment's understanding of rationality is an illusion because it misrepresents the historical nature of humanity. Indeed, human beings are first and foremost historical beings. Therefore, our knowledge, whether it be of others, the world or texts, is shaped and limited and possible because of our historicity. The aim of this paper is to come to a general understanding of Gadamer's position and to see, both what it has to offer us as Christians and what are its short comings. In order to understand what Gadamer is up to, we must first look, briefly, at the Enlightenment project itself.

A Brief Look at the Enlightenment

The roots of the Enlightenment are found in the thought of the French philosopher Rene Descartes. Descartes demanded that we rid ourselves from all prejudices which come from tradition or hasty thinking. He sought to find through pure self-reflection the Archimedian point of rationality, that one thing which is certain and indubitable, that could serve as a foundation upon which a solid edifice of knowledge could be built. In the method of Descartes we find the seed for the Enlightenment's contrast between reason and tradition, reason and authority. With the Enlightenment, tradition and authority are no longer seen as trustworthy dispensers of knowledge. Indeed, tradition and authority were seen by Enlightenment thinkers as hindrances and impediments to knowledge. In short, tradition and authority are prejudices that blind one from knowledge. The culmination of Enlightenment thinking is found in the thought of Immanuel Kant. His principle, "Have the courage to think for yourself!," can be seen as the motto which typifies the Enlightenment's confidence in the individual and distrust of authority and tradition.

Gadamer's Critique of the Enlightenment

In this, admittedly brief, overview of the Enlightenment there are three aspects of the Enlightenment which Gadamer severely attacks. First, is the notion of an ahistorical matrix or framework of rationality. Second, is the Enlightenment's attempt to pit reason against tradition and authority. Third, Gadamer challenges the Enlightenment's negative portrayal of "prejudice." The basis of Gadamer's critique is ontological. He does not critique Enlightenment thinking

by merely raising objections to the methodological, epistemological or metaphysical claims of the Enlightenment. Gadamer's critique is radical (i.e., getting at the roots) in that he argues that the Enlightenment's understanding of understanding is based upon a misunderstanding of being in the world.¹ In order to get at Gadamer's critique of the Enlightenment, it is necessary to explore his understanding of authority, tradition and prejudice.

Gadamer argues that the Enlightenment's disdain of authority and tradition as sources of prejudice, and therefore as irrational, is in itself an irrational prejudice. By denying authority and tradition any role in understanding, the Enlightenment misunderstood the very essence of authority and tradition. To understand authority as a matter of blind obedience to people in positions of power, as the Enlightenment did, is to totally misconstrue the very nature of authority. Gadamer writes:

But this is not the essence of authority. Admittedly, it is primarily persons who have authority; but the authority of persons is ultimately based not on the subjection and abdication of reason but on an act of acknowledgment and knowledge--the knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and for this reason his judgment takes precedence--i.e., it has priority over one's own . . . Authority in this sense, properly understood, has nothing to do with blind obedience to commands. Indeed authority has nothing to do with obedience but rather with knowledge.²

To acknowledge someone as authoritative is to acknowledge that that person knows more, is better informed. Therefore, for Gadamer, "acknowledging

To acknowledge true authority is not an irrational judgment but a highly rational one, for it acknowledges one's own limitations and ignorance and another's expertise and superiority

authority is always connected with the idea that what the authority says is not irrational and arbitrary but can, in principle, be discovered to be true."³ Indeed, it is on this basis that we have teachers, experts and the acknowledgment of superiors. To acknowledge true authority is not an irrational judgment but a highly rational one, for it acknowledges one's own limitations and ignorance and another's expertise and superiority.

With this acknowledgment of authority, Gadamer seeks to rehabilitate the concept of tradition, a concept that the Enlightenment railed against vehemently. Gadamer's critique

¹Bernstein, Richard J., *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis*, University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, 1993), p. 115-118.

²Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Truth and Method*, translation revised by Joel Weinsheim and Donald G. Marshall, Continuum (New York, 1989), p. 279.

³Ibid., p. 280.

goes beyond the fact that tradition can be an authority and a source of knowledge, though it is this also. For Gadamer, the real power of tradition is that its authority is nameless. That is, our finite historical being is marked by an authority (tradition) that is handed down to us and always has power over us yet is not grounded or justified by reasons or arguments. "Tradition has a justification that lies beyond rational grounding and in large measure determines our institutions and attitudes."⁴

Gadamer's understanding of tradition strikes at the heart of the Enlightenment project. As we saw earlier, Enlightenment thinkers such as Descartes and Kant, among others, sought an ahistorical framework, thus a universal and neutral framework, with which to make sense of reality, right or wrong, good or bad. These thinkers argued that the

Tradition has a justification that lies beyond rational grounding and in large measure determines our institutions and attitudes.

individual must use their own reason to determine what is true and what is false. We must rid ourselves of any outside or external entities and use our own "reason" to make sense or reality. More to the point not only did these thinkers think we should do this they also thought that we could do this. Here is where Gadamer's understanding of tradition stands as a severe criticism of the Enlightenment. For Gadamer, tradition is not an entity outside of us that can be dispensed with by force of will or through Cartesian self-reflective doubt. Tradition has a power over us in that it affects us in a profound way. Gadamer writes:

Our usual relationship to the past is not characterized by distancing us and freeing ourselves from tradition. Rather we are always situated within traditions, and this is no objectifying process--i.e., we do not conceive of what tradition says as something other, something alien. It is always part of us . . .⁵

Enlightenment thinkers saw tradition and therefore history as something within their control either to be governed by or disregarded depending on the decision of the rational agent. Yet Gadamer argues that in reality it is the other way around: we are always situated within tradition(s) and within a history and it is these that control and govern us. Gadamer states:

In fact history does not belong to us; we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live.⁶

This power of tradition and history over the individual is what Gadamer calls "effective history." It is history and tradition that gives us, forces upon us, our beliefs, our rationality, points of view and so on. We are not just beings a part of the flow of history we *are* historical beings.

That is, it is history, tradition and authority that shapes us and makes us who we are. To flesh this out more, Gadamer's understanding of prejudice and pre-judgment must be analyzed.

As we have seen, the Enlightenment railed against the notion of prejudice, whether prejudices from authority and tradition or from hasty and incorrect thinking. Indeed, all prejudices are illegitimate, for the Enlightenment. This critical attitude toward prejudice is what Gadamer calls the Enlightenment's "prejudice against prejudice." Gadamer argues that because we are historical beings, we cannot approach reality, a text the physical world etc., without prejudices. So, for example, whenever we read a text (or interpret an object) we project meaning, a meaning shaped by our history and prejudices, on to the text as soon as we experience it. Gadamer writes:

A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges from in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he [the reader] is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning.⁷

From the point of view of the Enlightenment, this is anathema for prejudices keep us from the real meaning of the text or object we are seeking to understand. Gadamer attacks the Enlightenment on this point because the history of ideas shows that not until the enlightenment did the concept of prejudices acquire the negative connotation that it has today. The term "prejudice" actually means a judgment that is rendered before all the data is in and a prejudice can either have a positive or negative value.⁸

But Gadamer's critique of the Enlightenment goes beyond correcting the idea that all prejudices are negative and a hindrance to understanding. Gadamer argues that we are historical beings "situated" in a certain history and certain tradition(s). Therefore, projections and prejudices arise out of the traditions and history of which we are a part. Indeed, we can only experience an object or text because we come to it already as historically experienced beings. What it means to be historically experienced is that we are prejudiced beings. Furthermore, it is being prejudiced, or more accurately being prejudiced beings, that gives the condition for experience. Gadamer puts it this way:

It is not so much our judgments as it is our prejudices that constitute our being . . . Prejudices are not necessarily unjustified and erroneous, so they inevitably distort the truth. In fact, the historicity of our existence entails that prejudice, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our ability to experience. Prejudice are biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something--whereby what we encounter says something to us.⁹

Thus we cannot approach a text or anything from a neutral stand point, from a point devoid of prejudice. Indeed,

⁴Ibid., p. 280-281.

⁵Ibid., p. 282.

⁶Ibid., p. 276.

⁷Ibid., p. 267.

⁸Ibid., p. 270.

⁹Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, quoted in *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, p. 127.

we approach a text or reality or whatever always from a prejudiced point of view. But even more so, it is this realization that all understanding involves some prejudice and this gives the hermeneutical problem its real thrust.¹⁰ Here it must be made clear exactly what Gadamer means by "hermeneutics."

Gadamer's Understanding of Hermeneutics

So far we have spoken of interpreting a text, reality or object. For Gadamer, hermeneutics is not just interpreting and understanding a text, hermeneutics is understanding and understanding is a primordial mode of being. That is, we are constituted by and engaged in interpretive understanding. Gadamer is not just concerned with how we interpret and understand texts but how we interpret and understand in general. Gadamer has widened the scope of hermeneutics, by giving it an ontological turn, from how we interpret and understand texts, to how we operate as interpretive and understanding subjects.

Gadamer's argument is this: because we are prejudiced beings, by the fact that we are historically affected beings, even before we begin consciously to interpret a text, tradition or truth claim, we have already placed it within a certain context, approached it from a certain perspective and conceived it in a certain way.¹¹ That is, before we come to understand the text or come to understand a truth claim we have already interpreted it. For Gadamer, interpretation is the explicit form of understanding, understanding is always interpretation.

Gadamer and the Problem of Relativism

Gadamer's discussion of prejudice and situated rationality raises the red flag of relativism or subjectivism. Indeed, this is the criticism of such thinkers as E.D. Hirsch and the evangelical biblical scholar Grant Osborne, to name but two. Both see Gadamer's understanding of understanding as leading to radical relativism and subjective anarchy.¹² This criticism is helpful in that it helps us clarify Gadamer's position. However, this criticism overlooks Gadamer's whole understanding of tradition, effective history and prejudice. For Gadamer, history has a power over us in such a way that it determines, by implanting in us the prejudices of that history or tradition, how we look at a text, object, work or art, etc. This is what Gadamer calls the "historically effected consciousness." We are not free to read the text anyway we like in any or every given situation because tradition, history and our prejudices govern the way we look at the world. Georgia Warnke hits the nail on the head when she writes:

On Gadamer's view, the knowledge that an individual or community has of a particular object of domain is not that individual's or communities alone but that of history. As statement about the meaning of a work of art [or text] is thus not a statement about individual perspectives or the personal prejudices of a group of interpreters . . . it is instead one that represents their inheritance. Indeed, part of Gadamer's point is how little interpreters and their personal point of view matter.¹³

Gadamer's position does not end up in radical relativism or subjective anarchy because of the power of tradition and effective history over the individual. Historically effective consciousness is more being than consciousness and therefore understanding is not a purely subjective act but an aspect of effective history. As Gadamer states, the focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror because the self awareness of the individual is only a flicker in the closed circuits of historical life.¹⁴

Here we can see, as Richard Bernstein has shown, Gadamer's attempt to move beyond objectivism and relativism.¹⁵ The concepts of prejudice, traditional and effective historical consciousness undermine both the Enlightenment's quest for objectivity and the radical subjectivism that many thinkers believe characterize contemporary culture. However, Gadamer's understanding of tradition and prejudice are not without their problems.

Gadamer's Vague Notion of Tradition and the Problem of Relativism Revisited

Though there is much to appreciate about Gadamer's incisive analysis of tradition and its power over the individual, it is still not clear exactly what Gadamer means by tradition. Is tradition monolithic? Is there a single and mainstream tradition? Is history a seamless entity running throughout time, free of disrupter? Whose tradition does Gadamer actually have in mind when he speaks of tradition? Gadamer's tradition is an innocent one but what about traditions that oppress the truth? What about traditions that are only evil and seek destruction. Gadamer does not seem to reflect on such possibilities, however real they are. These criticisms have been made by various thinkers but John Caputo sums well it up when he states:

He [Gadamer] describes the continuity of tradition, but he leaves unasked the question of whether the tradition is all that unified to begin with. He never asks to what extent the play of tradition is a power play and its unity something that has been enforced by the powers that be. His 'tradition' is innocent of Nietzsche's suspicious eye . . . He does not

¹⁰Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 270.

¹¹Warnke, Georgia, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason*, Polity Press (Cambridge, 1987), p. 77.

¹²See E. D. Hirsch *The Aims of Interpretation*, University of Chicago Press (Chicago, 1976), and Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, InterVarsity Press (Illinois, 1991).

¹³Warnke, *Gadamer*, p. 78-79.

¹⁴Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 276. see also Warnke, *Gadamer*, p. 79-80.

¹⁵Bernstein believes that the more one mistrusts the notion of objectivity, relativism, its direct correlate also falls by the wayside. For a strong argument in defense of this position see Phillip Kenneson's *There is No Such Thing as Objective Truth and it is a Good Thing Too*, in *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World*, edited by Timothy Phillips and Dennis Okholm, InterVarsity Press (Illinois 1995).

face the question of the ruptures within tradition, its vulnerability to difference, its capacity to oppress.¹⁶

Furthermore, still looming over Gadamer's idea of tradition and the "fusion of horizons" is the problem of relativism. We have seen that the charge of radical relativism or subjectivism does not take Gadamer's understanding of the historically effective consciousness seriously and therefore lacks argumentative force. But what about the notion that we are locked into our own traditions unable to speak or see across to those of another tradition? Gadamer rejects this type of relativism and we can see this in his idea of the "fusion of horizons." For Gadamer, understanding comes through the fusion of our horizon with that of another horizon (whether a horizon of a book, person or work of art). A horizon defines what we can see and understand, it can be a standpoint, view or situation which is shaped by our tradition. It is the range of vision from which we see. A horizon is limiting in that it shapes what we see and understand, but it is also open. Because there exist other horizons, that of books, persons, etc., to which we come into contact our horizon is always changing or expanding. When we come to understanding, a fusion of horizons, we come to a new understanding with the horizon of with which we have engaged. Through testing our prejudices with texts, persons, art and so on and testing the prejudices of those objects we come to an agreement (or disagreement) and a new understanding. We are not trapped into our own little horizon, suffocated by its limits. But within our horizon, and that of others, lies the possibility of new understanding.

But this does not totally relieve Gadamer from the charge of relativism. For Gadamer our understanding is always an understanding with application, these are not separate activities. Whereas interpretation and application have been, traditionally, treated as different aspects of understanding, for Gadamer understanding, interpretation and application are all internally related in the one single process of understanding. Certainly, Gadamer rejects any universal way of adjudicating between truth claims, some objective way to discern the truth of the matter. But even if there were such ways of adjudicating, which cannot be in Gadamer's project, our understanding will differ because different cultural situations will yield different understandings. For Gadamer, understanding is not just a reproductive activity but a productive activity as well. (According to Gadamer it is enough to say that we understand in a different way if we understand at all). Truth claims are culturally bound and in principle cannot command universal or absolute assent. This is because, for Gadamer, understanding truth is a matter of understanding truth from and by application to historical situations which in turn determine the way in which we understand truth. Therefore, ultimately a cultural historical relativism is unavoidable. David Ingram makes this point when he states:

Gadamer's theory of truth reaffirms relativism, albeit, not without qualification . . . Nevertheless, the relativity of truth claims with respect to culture bound discourses which

cannot in principle command universal assent is not thereby discounted. Even if there were to exist a clear etymological descent linking historically disparate traditions so that a "shared meaning" were to emerge, it is apparent that each interpretation of this meaning would yield an irreducibly unique, and therefore, different content. The meaning which is preserved and extended in cultural transmission is not an immutable essence, but undergoes cultural alteration in application to new historical circumstances . . . Moreover, the achievement of a universal consensus uniting all present discourses would hardly mitigate the problem of relativism, for such a consensus would itself require reinterpretation in light of future events.¹⁷

Though we must be careful if we charge Gadamer with being a relativist, and as we have seen some have not been careful, it seems that relativism in some shape or fashion looms over Gadamer's hermeneutical project. However, these criticisms, as well as others, notwithstanding, there is much to learn from Gadamer as well.

What Evangelicals Can Learn from Gadamer

Gadamer's attack on the Enlightenment's attempt at objectivity and neutrality seem to me to be right on target. There is no neutral starting point for observing the world, work of art, or text. We simply do not have an objective standpoint from which to look at the world. Indeed, it is hard to imagine what would constitute an objective standpoint or how we would or could recognize it, if we suddenly found ourselves looking from such a point of view.

But his critique is not just aimed at historical figures of the Enlightenment such as Descartes or Kant. Indeed, Gadamer's critique also applies to many historical figures of evangelical Christianity as well. For example, two theologians who have influenced much of American evangelicalism are Lewis Sperry Chafer and Charles Hodge.

Lewis Chafer was the one of the founding leaders of dispensationalism, and way of understanding scripture that has influenced American evangelicalism, or at least parts of evangelicalism, in a dramatic fashion. My intention is not to discuss dispensationalism but to show how Chafer shared some of the same tenants of the Enlightenment, though he eschewed much of Enlightenment thought.

American evangelicalism was significantly shaped by the philosophical thought of common-sense realism or common-sense philosophy. Common-sense philosophy was a strand of the Enlightenment that critiqued and railed against the approaches of Descartes, Kant and the excessive Enlightenment rationalists. Yet it shared the same concern for objectivity, neutrality and fear of prejudice and disdain of tradition that Descartes and his heirs possessed. This strand of the Enlightenment was greatly appropriated by American evangelical Christianity. We can see this in the thinking of Chafer (and as we will see, in Hodge as well, though I do not want to equate the two in their theological approaches or abilities) when he states in his *Systematic Theology* :

¹⁶Caputo, John D., *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction and the Hermeneutic Project*, Indiana University Press (Bloomington, 1987), p.110-115.

¹⁷ Hollinger, Robert, Editor, *Hermeneutics and Praxis*, University of Notre Dame (Notre Dame, 1985), p. 44.

the very fact that I did not study a prescribed course in theology made it possible for me to approach the subject with an unprejudiced mind and to be concerned only with what the Bible actually teaches.¹⁸

This statement reveals, in the words of Mark Noll, a "brisk anti-traditionalism" which was so characteristic of the Enlightenment. Since Chafer was not prejudiced by any theological school of thought, he reasoned that he was unbiased in his interpretation of Scripture. However this mentality is in itself a bias, a prejudice, for who is to say that a theology course will necessarily prejudice one's mind? (One wonders if Chafer advised his students to take the same approach to Scriptural interpretation?) Furthermore, we do not come to the Bible free from theological perspective, even if we have not had a prescribed course in theology. Indeed, we all come to Scripture with a theology. Therefore, the question is not whether we can approach Scripture non-theologically but whether the theology (or the theological prejudices we've inherited) we have is attested to in Scripture.

Chafer did not recognize that everyone belongs to a tradition, even if it is a tradition of anti-traditionalism. Chafer did not realize that all interpretation is historically conditioned because we are all effected by personal and cultural factors such as education (or lack thereof), economic status, family heritage and so on. These factors influence an interpreter to think and observe in a certain way, and Chafer was no exception.

Another theologian affected by the Common Sense philosophy was Charles Hodge. By mentioning these two thinkers I am no way suggesting that they agree in their theology, theological method, understanding of Scripture and what it teaches; or that they were equal in their ability as theologians. Charles Hodge is, arguably, the greatest theologian to emerge from the soil of America. His range of theological and culture consideration is extraordinary and, unfortunately his work is often overlooked or just plain caricatured.¹⁹

¹⁸Chafer, Lewis Sherry, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. Dallas Theological Seminary Press (Dallas, 1936), 8:5-6, quoted in Mark Noll's *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company (Grand Rapids) 1994, p. 128. Noll also points out that how common-sense philosophy was popularized and interpreted in America may have seriously altered the work of Thomas Reid and his colleagues (p. 87, nt.8).

¹⁹For example see Stanley Hauerwas's description of Hodge in his *Unleashing the Scriptures: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America*, Abingdon Press (Nashville, 1993). In his chapter entitled the *Bible and America*, he described Hodge as a Baconian fundamentalist who thought that anyone could read Scripture without further aid or help. Hauerwas is right to describe Hodge as being influenced by Francis Bacon. However, he is clearly wrong in describing Hodge as a fundamentalist. First, he is wrong because calling Hodge a fundamentalist is entirely anachronistic. Second, Hodge would have deplored the

Though Hodge railed against many tenants of the Enlightenment he shared their desire for objectivity, certainty and neutrality. He, like many thinkers of his time, had great confidence in reason. For Hodge, to come to divine truth, whether theological or scientific, it was a matter of gathering the "facts" that both the Bible and Nature revealed. Hodge writes:

The Bible is to the theologian what nature is to the man of science. It his store house of facts . . . [T]he duty of the Christian theologian is to ascertain, collect, and combine all the facts which God has revealed concerning Himself and our relation to him.²⁰

"Facts" for Hodge were simply there, whether in the Bible or in Nature. What shaped Hodge's understanding of "facts" was a Baconian scientism and Common-Sense philosophy. This philosophy, whose great originator was Thomas Reid, as we have seen assumed that we could approach the facts objectively and from a neutral starting point, a point devoid of all prior assumptions and prejudices. Common-sense philosophers claimed a neutral and objective epistemology. They considered themselves as to hold no

Though Hodge had much good to say both theologically and otherwise, it seems to me that Hodge was rather naive about our ability to approach Scripture or nature from a neutral, unbiased and objective standpoint.

special philosophy (common-sense lies in every human being), and to be open minded, unbiased, candid and objective.²¹ Hodge fully agreed with

common sense philosophy's confidence in reason and objectivity.

Though Hodge had much good to say both theologically and otherwise, it seems to me that Hodge was somewhat naive about our ability to approach Scripture or nature from a neutral, unbiased and objective standpoint. Indeed, as George Marsden has pointed out, Hodge and his colleagues, had many hidden assumptions concerning nature, design, God, the nature of the reliability of the senses and so on. Hodge thought we could see the facts as they are. But if we take the notion of tradition seriously we realize, as Gadamer shows us, that when we approach a text or fact, we place it in a certain context and have approached it from a certain perspective. Therefore we do not approach the "facts" from a neutral standpoint, letting the "facts" speak to us in all their "factness." Rather we see the "facts" from a certain perspective, which shapes and limits what we see and understand. Indeed, what we perceive to be "facts" and how we perceive their relation to one another has much to do

anti-intellectualism of the fundamentalist movement. Hauerwas is also wrong to say that Hodge believed anyone could read the Scripture on their own without further aid. Hodge believed the Holy Spirit played a large role in our understanding of Scripture and Christianity.

²⁰Hodge, Charles, *Systematic Theology*, III vols. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company (Grand Rapids, reprint 1993), vol. I, p.10-11.

²¹Marsden, George, *The Collapse of American Evangelical Academia*, in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, edited by Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, University of Notre Dame Press (Notre Dame, 1983), p. 219-264.

with the perspective from which we perceive them. In the words of Gadamer, our tradition and horizon give shape to our understanding of the world.

Practical Application of Gadamer

Gadamer helps us see through the Enlightenment's notion of objectivity. By challenging this notion of objectivity, Gadamer helps us to become aware of our prejudices and our historicity. But speaking more practically, Gadamer also provides a helpful key in our hermeneutical approach to Scripture.

Gadamer is helpful in his understanding of Socratic dialogue as a hermeneutical key for coming to truth. As we have seen Gadamer's understanding of the fusion of horizons is a key for understanding, indeed it is another name for understanding. But what is the process that brings forth this fusion of horizons? For Gadamer it is Socratic dialogue. When we read a text, we project our prejudices upon the text but at the same time we focus upon the text and listen for what it has to say to us. We enter into a dialogue with the text, putting questions to the text and allowing ourselves to be questioned by the text. This is what Gadamer calls the "hermeneutical circle" and action of "play." We enter into dialogue with a text, bringing forth all our being, asking questions of the text, seeking the right questions to ask, being aware of our prejudices. Yet, at the same time, we are prepared for the text to say something to us, to challenge us, to correct our prejudices. In the "play" of this "hermeneutical circle" truth emerges and our prejudices and understanding are changed. We are no longer the same person who entered into the "play" of interpretation. Gadamer states the purpose of dialogue when he states:

To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were.²²

This seems to me to state the point of biblical interpretation most clearly. We do not interpret Scripture in order to backup our already existing beliefs. Rather, the point of biblical interpretation is to be transformed from ignorance to understanding. Yet this is no easy process. It is not easy for some of us because it might not be clear how we go about questioning Scripture. Indeed, the art of questioning, as Gadamer points out, is just that an "art." It is difficult to ask the right questions. It takes practice and time to learn to ask the right questions. Indeed, it is often more difficult to ask questions than to answer them.

But when we question the Scriptures we do not ask questions just in the sense of asking what it means but in questioning what we think it teaches. It seems to me that Scripture elicits such questioning. If it didn't then it would not have the transforming power that it has. If we did not find any reason to question Scripture, if we were not puzzled and even offended by what it has to say to us, then either Scripture would have nothing new to say to us or we would have nothing new to learn.

At the same time, it is not easy for us to be transformed by Scripture, when we find what it teaches to be offensive. We let it speak to us but do not submit ourselves to the transforming power that Scripture has through the Holy Spirit.²³ Gadamer's analysis of dialogue and play is beneficial for us in this area. For when we come to Scripture, we come to it as the Word of God and must submit to it as such. We come to Scripture and lay bare our prejudices and points of view.

We come to Scripture knowing that it has something to say to us, something to teach us. Yet opening ourselves up to the Word of God, if we are honest, is a most difficult thing to do. It is difficult, and even frightening to open ourselves up to being questioned and transformed by Scripture. We do not like to admit our inadequacies, our ignorance, but if we take sin and the transforming power of the Word of God seriously we must admit that we fall short and that transformation, however difficult, is a desideratum.

So far I have described the hermeneutical circle as the relation between a reader and a text but as we have seen a reader does not approach the text alone. The reader is always a part of a tradition and that tradition plays a part in that readers understanding. Therefore, a reader brings the voices of that tradition to the text when he or she attempts to understand the text. But it is necessary to make the concept of tradition more explicit in our Scriptural hermeneutic. That is, when we attempt to interpret Scripture we must enter into dialogue with those of the Christian tradition who have interpreted Scripture before us. We should see what Augustine, Calvin, Aquinas, Schleiermacher, Julian of Norwich and others have to say about our understanding of Scripture. We cannot afford not to be in conversation with the body of Christ in our attempts to understand Scripture. Whereas Scripture alone is our authority, we are not, and should not be alone in the interpretive endeavor.

Because God has worked in the lives and interpretations of those Christians who have gone before us; and because our perspectives are limited by our own history and tradition; and because we are fallen human beings, it is only wise to be in conversation with the body of Christ in our attempts to understand God and Scripture. To deny the body of Christ, ether those who have gone before us or our contemporaries, in our interpretive endeavors, is to deny that God has worked in the lives and interpretations of those Christians who have gone before us.

Gadamer's project raises many issues and difficulties. I have attempted to address just a few of those issues. Though not without his own problems, he has much to offer the evangelical Christian intellectual concerning hermeneutics and epistemology. One would do well to engage Gadamer on one's own and wrestle with one of the great minds of the twentieth century.

²³I was once in a discussion with a woman who argued that she had the *right* to question God and Scripture. I think such thinking is rather cavalier for it does not take seriously the almighty God who is being questioned. Yet I believe God and Scripture are such that they cause us to question. Are not God's actions often puzzling? Are not the words of Scripture often challenging and difficult, even offensive? However, real courage does not lie in questioning God and His Scripture but in being willing to be transformed by Him and His Scripture.

²²Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 379.

An Appeal to General Revelation in the Homosexuality Debate

MATTHEW FRAWLEY

Once again the struggle over the status of homosexuals in our society has come to the fore. In 1993 President Clinton and Congress debated homosexuals in the military which ended in the famous "don't ask, don't tell" compromise. This summer the issue centers on gay marriages and the prohibition against gays achieving official minority status. On May 20th the U.S. Supreme Court voted 6-3 against a Colorado amendment, Amendment 2, that would bar the state of Colorado and its municipalities from enacting any legislation that would grant homosexuals any special minority privileges. The citizens of Colorado approved the amendment in 1992 by a 53 to 47 percent majority in part to void ordinances in Aspen, Denver, and Boulder. The Colorado Supreme Court initially ruled against the amendment, but the fight continued up to the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of *Romer v. Evans* (Roy Romer, Governor of Colorado v. Richard G. Evans, No. 94-1039). The U.S. Supreme Court's decision jeopardized similar ordinances in Alachua County, Florida, Idaho, Oregon, and Cincinnati, Ohio.

Less than a month later the House of Representatives passed the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) on July 12th by a vote of 342 to 67. The bill creates a federal definition of marriage as between one man and one woman and, more importantly, decouples the application of the "Full Faith and Credit Clause" of the Constitution to gay marriages. The bill is largely a response to a 1991 suit against the state of Hawaii by two lesbian and one homosexual couple who had their applications for marriage licenses denied. The suit, spear-headed by the Lambda Legal Defense Fund, made it to the Hawaii Supreme Court which ruled in May of 1993 that the state's "different-sex" restriction on marriage may qualify as gender discrimination. The justices decided to send the case back to trial court with the ultimatum that the government provide a "compelling" state interest for continuing the ban on same sex marriages. To date, that "compelling" interest has remained illusive, and by 1997 the Hawaii Supreme Court may rule to repeal the "different sex" restriction.

If the state is forced to grant marriage licenses to gay couples, the airlines will be booked solid as homosexual and lesbian couples flock to Hawaii to marry and then return home with a legal marriage certificate in hand. Under the "Full Faith and Credit" clause of the U.S. Constitution which requires every state to acknowledge formally the "public acts, records and judicial proceedings of every other state," their home states would be powerless to deny these couples privileges previously granted only to heterosexuals.

The Defense of Marriage Act does not prevent states such as Hawaii from granting marriage certificates to gay couples, but rather gives each state the power to decide for itself if it wants to recognize the same-sex marriages performed in other states. Thus the "Full Faith and Credit

Clause" would not automatically require every other state to acknowledge, formally gay marriages performed in Hawaii. Consequently, homosexuals and lesbians may travel to Hawaii, get married, and enjoy some time on the beach, but they still must rely upon what their home state decides before they can receive requisite benefits.

As would be expected, those who fought for the bill in the House debate based their arguments primarily upon the Bible and our nation's largely Judeo-Christian tradition. Several Representatives quoted passages of Scripture that defined marriage as between a man and woman. Some of the rhetoric sounded almost apocalyptic: Bob Barr (R-Ga), a sponsor of the bill, argued that the "very foundation of our society" was at risk, and Steve Buyer (R-Ind.) warned "A God-given principal is under attack."

Many leading Christians in the public debate have used similar arguments. For example, Gary Bauer, president of the Family Research Council, recently appeared on the TV show *Face the Nation* and was content to point out that homosexual activity and same-sex marriages are against God's intentions and that this issue contributes to the "larger effort...to strip away the Judeo-Christian values our nation was built on."¹

While social conservatives, especially conservative Christians, have every right to put forward such biblically based arguments, and should be encouraged to do so, the judicial debates in the Hawaii and U.S. Supreme Court indicate that reliance solely upon this level of argument will ultimately fail in the public forum.

So often are these religiously oriented arguments repeated that it appears as if the Bible is the only readily available basis for opposing homosexuality. In a debate featured in *U.S. News and World Report*, "Pro and con: Should gay marriage be legalized?" the only reasons that the author could drum up against gay marriage are that marriage is sacred and is primarily intended for procreation. The author states, "Same-sex marriage is a violation of basic biblical tenets...America's laws were written to preserve the Judeo-Christian tradition, which deems homosexuality aberrant."² Apparently, there are no other levels of reasoning to which we can turn.

However, while social conservatives, especially conservative Christians, have every right to put forward such biblically based arguments, and should be encouraged to do so, the judicial debates in the Hawaii and U.S. Supreme Court indicate that reliance solely upon this level of argument will ultimately fail in the public forum. The justices of the Hawaii and U.S. Supreme Courts who voted

¹ Family Research Council Washington Update (5/28/96). Quoted in Kirk Cameron, "Losing the Sexual Battlefield: A Parable" (Unpublished paper):2

²"Pro and Con: Should gay marriage be legalized?" *U.S. News and World Report* (June 3, 1996).

in favor of granting homosexuals more legal rights placed the burden of reasoning squarely against those who opposed gay rights. The Hawaii Supreme Court ordered the state to provide a compelling interest for upholding the prohibition against same-sex unions. In June 1994, the state legislature passed a law maintaining the ban on same-sex marriage with its sole compelling reason being that marriage is intended for procreation. Yet most legal experts agree that this is not a cogent defense because numerous heterosexuals enter into marriage without the intent of having children and because the standards set forth for marriage by the U.S. Supreme Court are in terms of commitment and choice, not procreation. Consequently, because the state seems at a loss to come up with any other reason to deny homosexuals the right of marriage, most believe that the Supreme Court will force the state to repeal the ban on same-sex marriages as early as 1997.

At issue in the U.S. Supreme Court decision are the grounds the voters of Colorado had for denying gays certain political and societal privileges. As Justice Scalia points out in the minority opinion, the amendment does not prevent gays from enjoying existing protections from discrimination; rather it denies them protection granted to minority groups. Specifically, the amendment states:

Neither the State of Colorado, through any of its branches or departments, nor any of its agencies, political subdivisions, municipalities or school districts, shall enact, adopt or enforce any statute, regulation, ordinance or policy whereby homosexual, lesbian or bisexual orientation, conduct, practices or relationship shall constitute or otherwise be the basis of or entitle any person or class of persons to have or claim any minority status, quota preferences, protected status or claim of discrimination (emphasis added).

Justice Anthony Kennedy, writing for the majority opinion, argued that the amendment violated the 14th amendment's guarantee of equal protection because it "identifies persons by a single trait and then denies them protection across the board."³ Five other justices agreed with Kennedy and felt that those who favored the amendment had to provide some objective, verifiable reason apart from religious preferences for this apparent "discrimination." In oral arguments which began in October of 1995, justices Ginsburg, O'Connor and Breyer specifically demanded from the lawyers defending the amendment a "rational basis" for enacting the amendment.⁴ Appeals to traditional views of marriage obviously did not qualify.

³Katia Hetter, "The New Civil Rights Battle...The Supreme Court Hands Gays a Win in the Struggle between Tolerance and Tradition," *U.S. News and World Report*, (May 20, 1996). (Taken from the Internet so no page numbers)

⁴Katia Hetter, "The New Civil Rights Battle...The Supreme Court Hands Gays a Win in the Struggle between Tolerance and Tradition," *U.S. News and World Report*, (May 20, 1996).

These two court decisions reflect what has transpired across the country over the last several decades. While fifty years ago an appeal to the Bible might have qualified as either a "compelling" or "rational" ground for an injunction against homosexual activity, today people in general are unwilling to accept the Bible as authoritative.

Given the fact that most in our society are not sensitive to the spiritual condition of our country, Christian warnings regarding the deviancy of the gay lifestyle come across as weightless, meaningless invectives that are out of touch with reality.

Arguments that rest upon the propositions of the Bible are appeals to what is called special revelation, what God reveals about Himself or His intentions for us through Scripture.

These truths of God and humanity have often been assumed to be "above reason" such that we could not discover them on our own. The question now becomes whether arguments against homosexuality can only be based on special revelation, that is, what God specifically states for or against certain lifestyle choices. If so, Christians will increasingly find themselves stymied in public debate. As the continued drift of America's legal code away from its Judeo-Christian past reveals, arguments based on special revelation do not and will not qualify as a "compelling" or "rational" basis for disallowing certain privileges to homosexuals. It is obvious, then, that the continued push by conservatives and conservative Christians to argue solely from the position of what the Bible does and does not permit for human behavior is doomed to fail. As Dr. Kirk Cameron writes, "Our side is stuck in a rhetorical groove that is certain to lose the cultural debate."⁵

Cameron's prediction was vividly brought home to me while watching a PBS special on the teenage gay community. One section of the documentary was devoted to coverage of an open forum before the school board of a southern California town. The high school had prevented gay and lesbian students from forming a club, but after vehement protests by the local homosexual community, the board decided to hold the forum. The arguments of those who wanted to continue the ban were no match against the appeals of the homosexual students. While several students diligently pointed out that homosexuality was against the Bible, the homosexual speakers made highly emotional pleas to end the discrimination and harassment. The person I remember most was a lesbian student who had to bend her head up to the microphone to speak. On the verge of tears, she emotionally detailed how other students had repeatedly harassed her simply because of her sexual orientation. All she wanted was a place of refuge, a place of peace. In a time when everyone has a soft-spot for pleas for tolerance, the board voted to allow the club in the school.

What moved the board to vote in favor of the homosexuals is indicative of a growing trend in the country; it is not what God commands that persuades but what we believe will foster community and promote personal self-fulfillment. The increasingly positive portrayal of the gay lifestyle in the media and the classroom reveals how much

⁵Kirk Cameron, "Losing The Sexual Battlefield: a Parable": 2.

the homosexual community has benefited from this current mood in our society.

The "No Different" Argument

Critical for further advancement and attainment of desired legal and societal privileges is the promulgation of the belief held by many that besides their sexual orientation, homosexuals are "no different." What this means in part is that there is nothing aberrant in their behavior itself that will hurt themselves or others. Many in our country have already bought into this idea and assume that external factors are largely responsible for any psychological and physical ailments which homosexuals might incur. The obvious recourse then is to push for greater societal acceptance and safer sexual practices. For example, in 1995 the School Board of Fairfax County, Virginia debated whether to continue the homosexuality segment (Family Life Education, FLE) of its sex-ed program. The FLE Curriculum Advisory Committee, which was formed to review the program, concluded that the board should not only continue FLE but do more to promote homosexuality as a positive lifestyle alternative. Educating students to accept homosexuals as "no different" as well as providing gay students with "information they need to be healthy, happy, and well-adjusted" would, so they reasoned, help reduce the abnormally high rate of suicide among homosexual students. The board obviously found the committee's reasons "compelling" and "rational" because in March of that year they voted to continue the program.⁶

The growing acceptance of the "no different" proposition continually weakens any arguments based on special revelation. Given the fact that most in our society are not sensitive to the spiritual condition of our country, Christian warnings regarding the deviancy of the gay lifestyle come across as weightless, meaningless invectives that are out of touch with reality. It is therefore critical for Christians to meet pro-homosexual challenge on the level which provides most of its support: science. Specifically, to refute the "no different" stance would require Christians to seek correlations between biblical injunctions and scientific research on the effects of homosexuality. From a theological perspective, it seems logical that Christians should have always probed the sciences for support of their views. Because we believe that the God who has created us is the God who has revealed to us His parameters for acceptable lifestyle choices in Scripture, it is reasonable to assume that the way God created us correlates with how God calls us to live. Thus there should be natural consequences to our lifestyle choices such that deviations from God's intentions should be objectively detectable.

In effect we could translate, but not reduce, a moral position into a health issue. If indeed studies show that

there are significant adverse consequences to the gay lifestyle, Christian claims against homosexuality could be recast in terms which qualify as "rational" or "compelling". No longer could the courts or society dismiss these arguments as personal religious beliefs because we would argue in the same manner others have to impose prohibitions on other types of behavior.

For example, our society has used medical studies to justify restrictions on smoking. Indicative of this trend is President Clinton's recent order to list nicotine as an addictive drug allowing the Food and Drug Administration to limit teenagers' access to tobacco. If the gay lifestyle is equally if not more hazardous to one's health, is it not inconsistent to allow greater

It is therefore critical for Christians to meet pro-homosexual challenge on the level which provides most of its support: science.

acceptance of homosexuality. As Paul Cameron asks, "How can we discriminate against smokers and smoking...because of the medical risks and not do the same for homosexuality?"⁷

Despite this enticing possibility, conservative Christians have shown great hesitation, even overwhelming reluctance, to engage the sciences. This may be due in part to the supposed "bruising" suffered in the evolution/creation debate.⁸ The portrayal of the Scopes-Monkey trial in *Inherit the Wind*, made it appear as if the tenets of Christianity were no match against the juggernaut of science. Or perhaps Christians have shied away from this level of reasoning because media coverage has made it appear as if the scientific studies on sexual orientation have verified the "no different" position.

The Myth of "No Different"

This perception is due in large part to Alfred Kinsey's research in the 1940s and 1950s on human sexual behavior. After interviews with 5300 males, Kinsey states, among other findings in his 1948 report "Sexual Behavior in the Human Male," that 10 percent of males are "more or less exclusively homosexual for at least three years between the ages of 16 and 55." This 10 percent figure was largely taken over by the homosexuality community to suggest that in fact 10 percent of the population was homosexual, a percentage of the population that no politician or corporation could overlook. As Robert Knight states:

The figure has been used to lobby for homosexual affirmation programs, the extension of family benefits to homosexual employees of corporations, and to frighten elected officials and business leaders into believing that they have to accommodate a sizable minority.⁹

Kinsey's research, along with other supposed findings

⁷Paul Cameron, "Teaching Homosexuality in the Classroom" *A Family Research Institute Special Report* (1995).

⁸Kirk Cameron, "Losing the Sexual Battlefield: A Parable": 1.

⁹Robert H. Knight, "Uses of Kinsey's Flawed Research," *In Focus*, Family Research Council. (Taken from the Internet)

⁶Paul Cameron "Teaching Homosexuality in the Classroom," *A Family Research Institute Special Report* (1995).

of science, appears to bolster the claim of "no different," but this is a well-perpetrated myth. Not only have these studies proven seriously flawed, or even downright duplicitous, more objective research shows that there are serious deleterious consequences to the gay lifestyle.

Recent studies have shown that the percentage of homosexuals in the population is at most two percent and possibly as low as less than one percent. David Forman, senior staff member at Radcliffe Infirmary, Oxford, authored a study in England and Wales between 1984 and 1987 which determined that only 1.7% of his sample had engaged in homosexual intercourse. Sexual behavior researcher Tom Smith found in his 1989 study that about 2% of sexually active adults reported being exclusively homosexual or bisexual the year preceding the survey.¹⁰

These more recent findings beg the question of how Kinsey could have ever arrived at such an extremely high figure. The answer is twofold. First, Kinsey's study group was not representative of the entire population. The most glaring misrepresentation is that 25% of the 5300 study subjects were prison inmates many of whom had been jailed for sex offenses with 44% of these inmates having had homosexual liaisons while in prison. This at a time when the prison population was less than one percent of the entire population.¹¹ In addition, Kinsey admitted to including several hundred male prostitutes in the survey. As a result, the data for the study could not accurately represent the population as a whole.

The second reason for the abnormally high figure feeds upon this misrepresentation. Abraham Maslow, a respected psychologist and friend of Kinsey, warned him that "because of the intimate nature of sexuality studies," asking for volunteers for the study will lead to a bias towards those who practice "unconventional or disapproved behavior." Maslow himself showed Kinsey before the publication of the report how volunteer bias would adversely affect his study, but Kinsey ignored Maslow's warnings, went public with the report and actually wrote in the report that it was still unclear how 'volunteering' influences studies on sexual behavior. In short, Kinsey lied in order to protect his desired results.

This pattern of obfuscation has prevailed in many studies which are decidedly pro-homosexual. For example, a study published in the January 1996 issue of *Developmental Psychology*, a journal of the American Psychological Association, endeavored to show that the common sense notion that children of lesbian mothers are more likely to become gay themselves is fallacious. Prior to 1983, 27 volunteer lesbians and their 39 children and 27 volunteer single mothers and their 39 children were recruited for the

study. Interviews were conducted when the mean age of the school age children was 9 1/2 and then again 16 years later. Due to attrition however, only 25 children of 18 lesbian mothers and 21 children of 16 single mothers participated in the reassessment.

After the two rounds of interviews, Susan Golombok and Fiona Tasker, who headed the project, declared that the children of lesbian mothers were no more likely to become homosexuals or suffer from mental ailments. However, as

Conservative Christians have shown great hesitation, even overwhelming reluctance, to engage the sciences. This may be due in part to the supposed "bruising" suffered in the evolution/creation debate.

the researchers at the Family Research Institute show, the study is faulty on two accounts. First, the make-up of the study group did not lend itself to truly objective results. The interviews from the test group suffered from the same volunteer bias as

the Kinsey report because the participants were respondents to newspaper ads for the project. Secondly, "Attrition in the sample...apparently resulted in disproportionately eliminating lesbian mothers of poor mental health, poorer social skills, and those who had more 'exclusive' homosexual inclinations," so that there was an "attrition bias" towards a more "favorable set of lesbian mothers." And third, each child was treated as an independent subject without consideration of "intra-family correlations, the fact that siblings are more likely to have the same opinions and inclinations. Consequently, because the study examined ¹³ such child-pair-clusters, "the use of parametric statistical tests, which assume random samples, normality of distribution, and independence of subjects was inappropriate."¹² The results of the study therefore cannot be regarded as providing a credible assessment of the effect of lesbian mothers on their children compared to single parent mothers.

Yet even if these results are accurate, the findings actually point in the other direction than Golombok and Tasker suggest. After the initial interviews in 1983, the authors concluded that,

the findings of the study have been consistent in showing no differences between children reared in lesbian households and children brought up by a heterosexual single parent...This lack of difference seems to negate the hypothesis that children brought up by an actively lesbian mother are likely to show psychosexual anomalies.

After the follow-up interviews 12 years later, the authors maintained their position and wrote that the children reared by lesbian mothers "had functioned well throughout childhood and adolescence [and] continued to do so in adulthood and experienced no long-term detrimental effects arising from their early upbringing."

However, the Family Research Institute examination of the data proves that both these claims are fallacious. The follow-up interviews clearly show that the set of daughters and sons of the lesbian mothers were more likely to have

¹⁰Kim I. Mills, "Gay Finding '10 Percent' Statistic Questioned" *Associated Press* (April 18, 1993). (Taken from Internet).

¹¹Brendan Murray, "Exposing the Myths" (February, 1992). (Taken from the Internet).

¹²Paul and Kirk Cameron, "Common Sense is Right: Lesbians' Kids More Apt to Become Gay" *Family Research Report* (March-April, 1996): 1,3.

homosexual inclinations than those of single mothers. Furthermore, when the children were initially tested for mental health, the children of single mothers actually rated lower, yet the follow-up assessments showed a dramatic turn-around. On both an anxiety and depression scale, children of lesbian mothers scored higher. This reversal becomes even more significant when the attrition bias is considered.

Instead of acknowledging this significant result, the authors reasoned that because scores for both groups fell within the normal range, children of lesbian mothers were no more likely to experience anxiety and depression. But this is a blatant shift in methodology; instead of comparing the two groups against each other as they had done elsewhere throughout the study, the authors compare the two groups to statistical findings imported from outside the study. This is done simply to hide the obvious result that the children of lesbian mothers, *when compared* to those of single mothers, were in fact more likely to suffer from anxiety and depression.

These two examples are indicative of a larger trend in which faulty research methods are condoned when the results favor a pro-homosexual position. Paul and Kirk Cameron write, "The contemporary U.S. elite seems increasingly willing to 'fudge' findings from the social sciences, no matter how significant or important they may be, in order to advance its view of 'how things *ought* to be.'" However, despite the duplicity of many researchers striving to validate the "no different" stance, the data itself paints a radically different picture of the personal and social repercussions of homosexual behavior.

The Objective Differences

The most readily apparent impact of the homosexual lifestyle is the medical consequences. Homosexuals have long claimed that there are no apparent mental or physical dangers associated with homosexual activity, and in 1986 even the American Psychological Association and the American Public Health Association reported to the U.S. Supreme Court that "no significant data show that engaging in...oral and anal sex, results in mental or physical dysfunction."¹³ Yet more recent, and objective, studies counter this claim. The difference between heterosexual and homosexual lifestyles is most dramatic in life-term expectancies. One study which compared 6737 obituaries from 18 U.S. homosexual journals to a large sample of obituaries from regular newspapers found that median age of death of homosexual men was significantly less than that of heterosexual men. The median age of death for married men was 75 and 57 for unmarried or divorced men. The median age of death for homosexuals, however, did not exceed 42. If AIDS was the cause of death, the median age was 39 or 42 if they died of something else. Moreover, homosexuals were 116 times more likely to be murdered and 24 times more likely to commit suicide. The figures for lesbians and

heterosexual females show the same correlation. Married women averaged an age of death of 79 while unmarried and divorced women had a median age of death of 71. Lesbians, on the other hand, had a median age of death of 44. 18% of the lesbians died of murder, suicide or accident which is a rate 456 times higher than that of white females between the ages of 25 and 44.¹⁴

The disparity in the median ages of death between homosexuals and heterosexuals is directly attributable to the gay lifestyle. For example, homosexuals engage in some form of oral sex with most of their partners and ingest semen from about half of these. Because semen contains many of the germs carried in the blood, gays risk contracting any diseases their sexual partners might carry. Furthermore, the penis often has tiny lesions, as well as having been in unsanitary places like the rectums of their various partners, so that individuals who engage in oral sex may become infected with hepatitis A or gonorrhea.¹⁵

Rectal sex proves equally as prolific and dangerous. Surveys indicate that about 90% of homosexuals have engaged in rectal intercourse with approximately 67% of this percentage performing it regularly. One six-month study of daily sexual diaries found that gay men had an average of 110 sex partners and 68 rectal encounters a year. The vaginal wall of a woman is several cells thick so that there is no danger of semen penetrating into her blood stream. The anal wall, on the other hand, is only one cell thick so that it can easily bruise and tear. Homosexuals who engage in rectal sex thus expose themselves to contracting whatever germs are found in their partner's saliva, feces, and semen. The obvious danger of this activity leads Paul and Kirk Cameron to call rectal sex "probably the most sexually efficient way to spread hepatitis B, HIV, syphilis and a host of other blood-borne diseases."¹⁶

Tolerance and Marriage

Some gay activists acknowledge the danger of oral and rectal sex but then reason that this shows why legalizing gay marriages is so important for our society. If we grant marriage certificates to homosexuals, we will help encourage homosexuals to enter long-term relationships and reduce promiscuity. In the pro and con article on gay marriages in *US News and World Report*, an advocate writes,

Gay men and lesbians in committed relationships want to be able to celebrate their love and fidelity in the same way that heterosexual couples do. Religious conservatives complain that gay relationships are 'promiscuous,' but then oppose allowing same-sex couples to join together in a legal institution that promotes stability and commitment. And in an age of AIDS, encouraging marriage is a wise public-health strategy.¹⁷

However, the evidence for reduced HIV infection in

¹⁴Paul and Kirk Cameron (1994).

¹⁵Paul and Kirk Cameron (1994).

¹⁶Paul and Kirk Cameron (1994).

¹⁷"Pro and Con: Should gay marriage be legalized," *U.S. News and World Report* (June 3, 1996).

¹³*Amici curiae* brief, in *Bowers v Hardwick* (1986). Quoted in Paul and Kirk Cameron, *Medical Consequences of What Homosexuals Do* (Washington, DC: Family Research Institute Incorporated, 1994).

steady gay relationships is utterly absent. In fact, recent studies have shown that long-term relationships show a marked increase in HIV infection, exactly opposite of what is predicted. It turns out that gays in long-term, committed relationships are more likely to engage in sexual activities in which transfers of STDs are highly probable. An Italian survey in 1989, a British study of the sexual diaries of 385 gay men, a U.S. study in 1994, the largest of its kind involving 13000 homosexual men, and a Canadian study have all come to the same conclusion: homosexual partners in a long-term relationship are more likely to engage in high-risk sexual practices.¹⁸ Promoting gay marriages therefore has the exact opposite result that people assume. Instead of helping to reduce the spread of STDs, gay marriages may exacerbate the growing epidemic. If this is not a "compelling" and "rational" reason for continuing the ban on gay marriages, I don't know what is.

As these studies show, if we encourage gay marriages and promote the gay lifestyle in general, we risk pushing those with homosexual inclinations toward an early grave. The probability of this outcome is further increased through the endeavor to foster a "tolerant" atmosphere for homosexuals in our society, as the Fairfax County School Board is pursuing. Despite what most believe, there is simply no evidence to substantiate the claim that the high rates of depression and suicide among gays is attributable to any form of societal discrimination. Gary Remafedi's 1991 study of 137 gay and bisexual male adolescents found that although 30% of the subjects had attempted suicide, these attempts "were not explained by experiences with discrimination, violence, loss of friendship [after coming out], or current personal attitudes toward homosexuality."¹⁹ What the study discovered was that the leading indicators for possible suicidal tendencies were the age at which the homosexual or bisexual youth became sexual active, took on feminine mannerisms, and defined himself as a homosexual. The earlier a youth in the study began to practice the gay life-style, the more likely he would attempt suicide. As Remafedi states,

[G]ender nonconformity and precocious psychological development were predictive of self-harm...For each year's delay in bisexual or homosexual self-labeling, the odds of a suicide attempt diminished 80%.²⁰

The results of Remafedi's study demonstrate how dangerous these pro-homosexual sex-ed programs could be. Instead of helping to prevent suicide among students with homosexual inclinations, promotion of the gay lifestyle may result in more adolescents attempting suicide.

Made that Way?

The only possible defense left for continuing these programs is the argument that homosexuality is genetically

determined. If so, teaching about the gay lifestyle would not push students towards homosexuality but only provide a positive environment for each student to discover his or her predisposed sexual orientation. Gay advocates have largely touted this "born that way" position to stave off any suggestion that homosexuality is in any way socially influenced. They believe that our society will be forced to accept gays if it can be proven, or at least appear to be proven, that homosexuals have no choice but to be gay. And, in a time when many consider sexual expression essential for personal fulfillment, how could we deny homosexuals their natural, predisposed longings?²¹

Much of the rhetoric in favor of this position is based upon Simon LeVay's "discovery" that the size of particular nuclei in the hypothalamus (INAH-3) varied with sexual orientation. Specifically, LeVay reported in *Sexual Brain* that this nucleus was smaller in homosexual males than in heterosexuals. From his rather reductionistic perspective, he reasoned that this result shows homosexuality to be less of a choice than a predetermined disposition. In short, gays are born that way.

Gay rights advocates have unhesitatingly employed this study and research such as *Golombok and Tasker* to bolster their claim that homosexuality is not so much a matter of nurture as nature. However, this position is both questionable strategically and insupportable scientifically. As Roy Porter suggests in his review of *Queer Science* and *A Separate Creation*, proving that sexual orientation is biologically determined does not necessarily entail greater societal acceptance. Porter notes how the Nazis used the work of their scientists who had thought they had proved homosexuality as a biological trait to classify homosexuals as degenerate and have thousands of them exterminated.²²

Furthermore, several scientists have noted that the data simply do not support LeVay's claims. LeVay only used 41 brains in his study, and the homosexual brains he dissected were from men who died of AIDS. This leaves open the possibility that the virus and medication could have had an effect on the size of the nucleus. In addition, no one has been able to prove that this nucleus in the hypothalamus plays any role in sexual orientation. It could therefore have been mere coincidence and not a direct correlation. LeVay also did not properly account for the significant amount of overlap in the samples. His conclusions could only be truly compelling if all the heterosexual nuclei were larger than the largest homosexual nucleus, but this was not the case. Consequently, LeVay's proposal that a smaller INAH-3 nucleus could lead to a homosexual disposition does not account for the heterosexual brains in his study who had equally small INAH-3 nuclei. There is the chicken and the

¹⁸Paul and Kirk Cameron, "What's Wrong with Gay Marriage?" *A Special Report from Family Research Institute* (1996).

¹⁹Paul Cameron "Teaching Homosexuality in the Classroom" *A Family Research Institute Special Report* (1995).

²⁰Paul Cameron (1995).

²¹It should be noted that equating personal fulfillment with sexual activity is quite new. Early in this century, for example, it was thought by many that only through abstinence could one achieve true and lasting knowledge. See W.W. Bartley's book on Ludwig Wittgenstein and his struggle to suppress his homosexual desires in order to maintain purity of thought. W.W. Bartley, *Wittgenstein* (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1973): 25-26, 159-197.

²²Roy Porter, "Born that Way?" *New York Times Book Review* (August 11, 1996): 8.

egg problem as well. LeVay and many other scientists maintain a linear mode of thought in regards to biology and human activity: the make-up of our brains determines our activity. However, it is possible that our actions, even sexual activity, may shape parts of our brains. In all, these problems and questions with his study graphically show how exceedingly presumptuous LeVay's "born that way" claim truly is.

Recent studies which have not resorted to the "fudging" techniques of LeVay or Golombok have shown the very opposite to be true. Remafedi's 1992 study of 35,000 Minnesota adolescents found that sexual orientation was not fixed at an early age.²³ Instead the percentage of those with homosexual inclinations steadily increased between the ages of 12 and 18. These findings led Remafedi to conclude, "The observed relationship between sexuality and religiosity, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status provided further evidence of social influences on perceived sexual identity."²⁴ One result of the study that is particularly relevant to the sex-Ed programs is that "[the] reporting of homosexual attractions among boys and girls rose steadily with socioeconomic status, reflecting parental education level and, perhaps, tolerance for sexual diversity."²⁵ Promoting the gay lifestyle as a positive alternative may thus lead to a greater number of students choosing that lifestyle which, as noted earlier, may result in a greater number of adolescents experiencing depression and attempting suicide. It seems obvious, then, that this is yet another "compelling" and "rational" reason for continuing societal barriers against the gay lifestyle.

The results of scientific studies on sexual behavior clearly favor the Christian conservative in the public forum. But where is the voice that focuses public attention on these findings? Oddly, it is often not found in Christian circles. We seem content to fight the moral crusade with weapons that are proving increasingly ineffective. We satisfy ourselves with reiterating biblical claims which many Americans simply dismiss as our own personal religious beliefs.

More and more people in our society will not accept the Scripture's injunctions against certain sexual activities as authoritative. Appeals to special revelation alone cannot be our sole defense against pro homosexual rhetoric. It is incumbent upon us, at least from a pragmatic standpoint, to seek other avenues of persuasion. If we engage the sciences, we meet any opposition head on. Our society still regards scientific research as authoritative, and with the tide of evidence heavily in our favor, we can state convincingly that there are compelling and rational reasons for not promoting the gay lifestyle in any form.

Beyond the pragmatic need to engage the sciences, Christians have a theological duty to promote the sciences. We do not worship only God the Revealer but God the Creator as well. Yet we implicitly deny this latter title of

God when we do not engage the sciences in the homosexuality debate. Because God is one God there should be detectable correlations between God's intentions for us and the natural consequence of our actions. Our lifestyle choices influence us primarily on a spiritual level but affect us psychologically and physically as well. While science is silent in regards to the former, it can detect the mental and physical repercussions of our submission to God or rebellion against Him. To neglect the sciences, is thus to deny how God has made us: spirit, mind and body.

Although we can lament the fact that people no longer submit themselves to God's Word, it is critical that we continue the struggle in the public forum. We must be sensitive to what others consider authoritative and respond accordingly. Our courts and legislative bodies are quite dependent upon scientific research, and because science can legitimately be seen as a facet of general revelation, we must take the risk to see what science reveals. And in regards to the gay lifestyle, science has indeed detected what Christians should expect: deviating from how God created us leads to a marked decrease in quality of life. As a duty to our society and every homosexual we must promote that which will assist in nurturing spiritual as well as physical and mental health. To do this we must make an appeal to general revelation in the homosexuality debate.

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Editors' Note

The Editors of the *Princeton Theological Review* are fully aware that, for many people, the 'homosexuality debate' is not an abstract, academic issue, but rather a deeply felt, personal matter involving real lives and profound issues of human identity and worth. It is our belief that precisely because of its importance, the issue of homosexuality must be thoroughly and compassionately addressed by thoughtful Christians.

To that end:

The Editors would like to offer the pages of the *Princeton Theological Review* as a forum for responses to Mr. Frawley's piece, or, indeed, to substantial counter-proposals in article form.

²³Paul Cameron, "Teaching Homosexuality in the Classroom" *A Family Research Institute Special Report* (1995).

²⁴Cameron (1995).

²⁵Cameron (1995).

Why should Christians be concerned with the Foundationalism/Antifoundationalism Debate?

JAY WESLEY RICHARDS

Introduction

In recent days, academic discussions, particularly when concerned with rationality and knowledge, have teemed with references to foundationalism. This is especially true in theological circles which aspire to engage contemporary philosophical concerns. Nevertheless, many of these conversations suffer obscurity because of the vagueness and variability in the key term *foundationalism*. In this essay, I canvass the high points of the debate over foundationalism, attempt to clarify the concepts at stake in the debate, define some terms, recommend some needed distinctions, and offer some reasons why this debate should occupy the minds of Christians.

I. Foundationalism

Most generally, the debate over foundationalism is a debate in *metaepistemology*, particularly over structural options in epistemology. It resides at a once remove from epistemology (i.e., the theory of knowledge). Foundationalism is an abstract term which encompasses different epistemological theories which in some ways are very different, such as Locke's empiricism and Descartes' rationalism. A term that includes such disparate theories may seem like a gerrymander. However, by including these apparently contrasting theories under the one rubric of foundationalism, theorists intend to expose an underlying structural similarity that makes such theories kissing cousins.

Foundationalism is usually concerned with one of three things:¹

- (1) A theory of rationality
- (2) A theory of knowledge
- (3) A theory of authentic science (*scientia*, *Wissenschaft*).

Nevertheless, in theological circles, it usually orbits around questions of rationality, such as the question of whether or not it is rational to hold some religious belief (such as that of God's existence). So we'll consider it here only as (1), a **theory of rationality**.

Generic Foundationalism

Much confusion arises over failure to distinguish between foundationalism in the most general sense and some popular foundationalist options. All foundationalists are concerned

with *noetic structures*: the set of things, propositions, ideas, etc. that one believes. Foundationalists specify certain beliefs, and set up an index for degree of belief, so that beliefs will be held with the proper firmness or tentativeness. Also, they may recognize a degree of ingression.² That is, some beliefs are so foundational that their refutation would affect many other beliefs. So my belief that I ate oatmeal this morning has far less depth of ingression than the belief that my wife is named *Ginny*, or that there is an extramental reality. The foundationalist wishes to establish rules and criteria for how beliefs should be related to each other, what should count as evidence and grounds for beliefs, and for how strongly one should hold to different beliefs. These rules go into the foundationalist's evaluation of the rationality of some or another belief or set of beliefs.

The foundationalist distinguishes between *non-basic* and *basic* beliefs (whether or not he uses these terms). Non-basic beliefs are those beliefs which are held on the basis of other beliefs. Basic beliefs are beliefs that are held immediately, and not on the basis of other beliefs. Both of these types of beliefs may be rational for the foundationalist. But somehow non-basic beliefs must end with basic ones. Non-basic beliefs are not self-justifying. One can't rationally hold a non-basic belief as if it were a basic one. So, for a belief to be rational, every non-basic belief must terminate with some *properly* basic belief.

In practice, we recognize this distinction intuitively. For example, if a juror simply presupposes the guilt of a defendant based on the defendant's ethnicity, we would say this was an irrational (and indeed immoral) belief. One can't just conclude that a person is guilty of a crime because that defendant belongs to an ethnic group whose members one believes are guilty by definition. There must be some relevant set of grounds and evidence for concluding that the defendant is guilty, and the race of that individual is not part of that relevant set of evidence. Non-basic beliefs must have some type of relevant *evidence* to support them, or must be entailed by some *properly* basic belief. On the other hand, we do not usually require that someone who concludes that $1 + 1 = 2$ provide additional evidence for that belief. We usually assume that once someone understands what these symbols mean, he or she will just conclude that $1 + 1 = 2$. For at least some individuals, this belief may be rationally held immediately or basically.

Disagreement among foundationalists arises over two primary questions: how certain beliefs are to *relate* to each other, and which beliefs may be rationally held as

¹ This taxonomy is from Nicholas Wolterstorff's "Introduction" in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. by Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

² These attributes are from Alvin Plantinga, *Reason and Belief in God*, in *ibid.*, 48-50. Most of the points discussed here are dependent on this article by Plantinga, as well as his discussion in chapter ten of *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

basic. Determining the latter are conditions for proper basicity, because "not just any belief is properly basic."³

Classical Foundationalism

The current debate over foundationalism is unnecessarily muddled, particularly in theological circles, because of a failure to distinguish between generic foundationalism as described above, and what we might call modern or *classical foundationalism*.⁴ The latter is a species of foundationalism which restricts entry for proper basicity to two or sometimes three types of beliefs: beliefs which are *self-evident* (such as certain mathematical and logical beliefs, which need no supporting evidence other than themselves), or *incorrigible* (that is, they can't be doubted or possibly false). Incorrigible beliefs include some perceptual beliefs and beliefs about one's own mental state, such as *my leg seems to hurt*, or *I am being appeared to greenly* (I think I see something green before me). Some would include beliefs which are *apparent to the senses* in the requisite way, although these usually reduce to some incorrigible beliefs about such appearances. So, for example, in Locke's *representational* theory, what we behold are not external objects themselves, but the *ideas* in our minds which represent those objects.

Classical foundationalism has in various forms been the *main epistemological option* in the West for several centuries. As such, it has controlled the terms of the debates. It has shaped the way faith and reason are related in debates in philosophy of religion. **In fact, it has been so prevalent that foundationalism is often used as a synonym for classical foundationalism.** But if we are to gain clarity in this debate, we should remember that classical foundationalism is only one cluster of foundationalist options. Other foundationalist theories are possible.

It is now generally agreed that *classical foundationalism* has collapsed for several reasons. For one thing, it is overly stringent, excluding most of the beliefs we all hold. It is also very inhospitable to how people actually form beliefs. It seems to exclude beliefs held on memory, or on the basis of testimony, as well as most of our perceptual beliefs about the existence and properties of the objects we perceive. But these beliefs make up most of the beliefs we all have. Moreover, classical foundationalism fails to accommodate scientific practice, even though it is often used to defend science against irrationalism. If it *were* a correct account, it would define most of what scientists and everyone else believes as irrational.

But perhaps most damaging, it is self-referentially incoherent, since the claim itself fails to meet its own criteria for proper basicity. For instance, consider the claim

(CF) No belief may be held basically unless it is self-evident or incorrigible, and all non-basic beliefs must be entailed by some set of beliefs which terminates with a properly basic belief.

Now, how is one to hold (CF)? Is it meant to be held basically? If it is, it clearly violates its own restrictions. For surely it is not self-evident or incorrigible. At least it is not such to many thoughtful individuals, as well as me (whether I am thoughtful is another matter). And many others tend to think it is plainly false.⁵ As a result, unless one can come up some belief that qualifies for proper basicity, which itself entails (CF), it cannot be viewed as a properly held belief on its own terms. So it dies the death of self-refutation. The demise of this structural epistemological option--which has held sway in Western thought for several centuries--indicates that we are at a very significant and somewhat convulsive period in the history of Western thought, not unlike the time of Augustine, the Reformation, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment. The intellectual future is in flux, and a popular consensus seems to have dissolved.

II. The Current Epistemological Landscape

Anti-foundationalism and Nonfoundationalism

The collapse of classical foundationalism has given rise to a plethora of new epistemological proposals. These are far too numerous even to summarize here; nevertheless, we can make a few generalizations. Some declare the end of epistemology, like Richard Rorty and Paul Feyerabend. This is a little hasty, and seems to issue from an inability to see beyond the option of classical foundationalism. At the very least, there is no need for Christians to jump aboard the epistemic nihilism of atheists such as Rorty. There are many options left to explore.

In theological circles, many identify foundationalism *in general* with the Enlightenment quest for *certainty* for all our beliefs. And in fact, the quest to answer the questions of skeptics has been an important motivation for most modern foundationalist proposals. Descartes and Kant are two obvious examples. However, in the quest to defeat skeptical objections, the modern foundationalist has had a propensity to concede far too much. So, for example, Kant was willing to abandon the claim that we can perceive an extramental causality between causes and effects in order to answer Hume's skepticism.

Along with certainty, the foundational beliefs would ideally be *universal*. That is, they would be shared by all reasonable people, and so could form a basis of agreement among traditionally conflicting groups, such as religious communions. Universally held foundational beliefs could then serve to unite factions around some

³Plantinga, *Reason and Belief in God*, 58.

⁴This is Plantinga's term. Of course there is nothing sacred about it, although it does serve to make a distinction that is too infrequently made.

⁵See *ibid.*, 59-63.

common cause for social, intellectual, and political purposes. In light of the protracted wars between religious and ethnic groups in Europe, the quest for universal "foundations" is quite understandable. For no small reason did Jefferson begin the *Declaration of Independence*: "We hold these truths to be self-evident . . ."

The modern quest for certainty and universality for our foundational beliefs has surely led to the development of foundationalist proposals. However, too many commit an unnecessary *non sequitur* here. Upon discovering that not much certainty or universality is attainable for most of our beliefs, they pronounce *foundationalism* dead. But of course this doesn't follow. The demise of classical foundationalism does not usher in anti-foundationalism by default. Just because the search for certainty and universality led to many parsimonious epistemologies, this does not mean that some of the key insights of generic foundationalism are incorrect. For surely we *do* hold some beliefs on the basis of others, and some immediately (such as my belief about my breakfast this morning). Surely there are some beliefs that are self-evident and incorrigible, even if we can't rest every other belief we have atop them. Surely we recognize the role that presuppositions play in everyday thought and debate, and the way they shape world views. And certainly we often discern when beliefs are rationally and irrationally held.

Just because theorists have had great difficulty coming up with criteria to delineate these distinctions, this does not mean such distinctions are illegitimate. Some "foundationalist intuitions" may be correct even if particular foundationalist proposals have been found wanting. After all, are we to abandon all of our pre-theoretical beliefs until someone comes up with a theory that exhaustively formalizes them? That is, should we believe

(NF) Unless an adequate foundationalist theory is established, one should not persist in making foundationalist distinctions in every day life.

Such a requirement is as stingy as any classical foundationalist proposal. Why think it is true? If we were restricted by such dicta, we would all be inveterate skeptics about most of what we believe. Perhaps we should be more modest about what formalized theorizing can and cannot accomplish. Epistemological theories can formalize criteria which we only vaguely recognize in everyday affairs. But the hope for some future theory should not be allowed to legislate our common sense beliefs until that day when it finally delivers. Such philosophical theories are parasitic on common sense, and draw their life blood from it. We should not be intimidated into continual self-doubt by the failure of theoretical aspirations. After all, if we are not rationally justified in trusting the general reliability of our faculties (all things being equal), no theory is going to give us back this justification, since we would have to trust those faculties in order to evaluate the theory. This sort of common sense anti-skeptical bias militates against the stinginess of classical foundationalism; but it can also serve to inoculate us against some anti-foundationalist rhetoric which inveighs against all attempts to employ distinctions between basic, non-basic, irrational and rational beliefs.

Closely related to anti-foundationalism is *nonfoundationalism*. This is a popular option in theology at the moment. Its partisans include George Lindbeck, Ronald Thiemann, Kathryn Tanner, William Placher, Stanley Hauerwas, John Thiel and maybe Hans Frei. (For whatever reason, most of these have also been associated with Yale.) These players often include Karl Barth among their number, although the inclusion of Barth is highly contentious, and at the very least, anachronistic. Unfortunately, these nonfoundationalists have a propensity to restrict the options by conflating foundationalism in general with what we have called classical foundationalism. They also tend to define their project in contrast to their understanding of foundationalism, and so become dialectically defined by classical foundationalism. The excesses of classical foundationalism become the inadequacies of its opposite in nonfoundationalism.

There are important differences between these thinkers, but we can gain insight by focusing on one. Conveniently, John Thiel has summarized this train of thought in his small volume entitled, quite perspicuously, *Nonfoundationalism*.⁶ As Thiel defines it, nonfoundationalism hails to pragmatists such as Dewey, C. S. Peirce, William James, and Richard Rorty, draws from the critique of philosophers such as Quine and Sellars, and joins in the "linguistic turn" of philosophers such as the later Wittgenstein. Unfortunately Thiel seems oblivious to the whopping inadequacies in the proposals of these philosophers, as well as their incompatibility with Christian views.

Thiel's argument betrays the fact that this band of nonfoundationalists actually *means something different* by foundationalism than what we described above. Because of this, nonfoundationalism is not a simple opposite to foundationalist theories of rationality and knowledge. Thiel does note in passing the properties of foundationalism such as the distinction between basic and non-basic beliefs, and seems to reject what we have called classical foundationalism for some of the reasons we mentioned. However, he admits that for nonfoundationalists, "foundationalism" usually functions as a rhetorical and pejorative foil over against which nonfoundationalism defines itself: "These definitions [of foundationalism] are the property of the nonfoundationalist and are offered as expressions of foundationalism's inherent deficiencies" (2). The careful reader can discern that what Thiel means by foundationalism, and what he objects to, has to do with a certain Enlightenment desire for universal, unquestionable, context-neutral criteria for assessing all claims, including theological ones (63-4). One might wonder whether these are the essential properties of foundationalism, or whether they are more properly identified as central *motivations* behind modern foundationalism. Nevertheless, foundationalism as Thiel understands it he calls the "epistemological Pelagianism of modernity" (65). The theologian infected with the "Cartesian anxiety" of the foundational enterprise seeks some criteria outside the "web" of Christian beliefs in order to justify theology's claims.

⁶(Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994). Future references to this work are included parenthetically in the body of the essay.

Nonfoundational theology, on the other hand, is "marked by its opposition to the theoretical first principles of apologetical theologies," and it emphasizes the unavoidably contextual nature of all human enterprises, including theology. Nonfoundational theologians insist there are no context-free foundations, and "use the metaphor of foundations to name an extrabiblical theory or a supposedly universal human experience that such a theory purports to represent" (86). But this is just a different thing from what the word "foundationalism" usually means in philosophical discussions. Thiel recognizes this, but contends that since theology has its own context, it is free to appropriate such a term for its own use (88). Whether or not theology has some such right, applying idiosyncratic meaning to a commonly used word is bound to prevent clarity in academic debate.

By making such use of the term, Thiel can offer quite surprising claims, such as the following:

Foundationlessness in the work of theologians like George Lindbeck, Ronald Thieman, and Stanley Hauerwas refers to Christian faith as it has been normatively expressed, practiced, and experienced through the ages. . . . *Foundationlessness* . . . names the web of practiced Christian belief faithful to the norms shaped by ecclesial life" (87).

This is surprising since many Christians would assume that they are obliged to "ground" their beliefs, or at least some of them, on something like Scripture, revelation or the Creeds. This might even be a *normative* conviction. Many suppose that Christians should take certain claims as premises in their arguments, which they reason *from*. But this seems structurally similar to foundationalism. This fact suggests that Thiel means something different by the word *foundationalism* than we might initially suspect.

Thiel's "nonfoundationalist" contentions about persons being embedded in social and linguistic contexts, and about the situatedness of reason does not answer, or even clearly address, the issues of generic foundationalism as we have described them. The fact that one gains "background beliefs" from being a part of the Christian context, or that there are no contextless views, does not answer the question of whether we have basic and non-basic beliefs, whether some of these are justified or warranted, and whether we hold some or another religious belief basically or nonbasically. In fact, Thiel concedes that, in the judgment of nonfoundationalist philosophers such as Quine, Rorty and Sellars, nonfoundationalist *theologians* would be designated hopelessly foundationalist, because of their commitments to the Christian tradition. So whatever virtues or vices there may be in "nonfoundational theology," its divergence from the normal meaning of some key terminology prevents it from sufficing as a critique of all possible foundationalist theories of rationality.

One might also be suspicious of some of the anti-modern, traditional-sounding rhetoric of nonfoundational theologians. One is tempted to ask Thiel, "Where does the notion of *the web of practiced Christian belief* come from?" Is *that* a biblical image? If not, might it evince the presence of an "extrabiblical theory"? Of course the "web of belief"

is a quite contemporary image for construing knowledge, and comes from the physicalist philosopher W. v. O. Quine. It may be correct, but it is an extrabiblical theory, if ever there was one. So we should not be hoodwinked by Thiel's bombast into thinking his epistemology is intrinsically biblical or even traditional. He frequently criticizes "modernist," "foundationalist" theologians for accommodating contemporary philosophical trends. He insists that for Christian theology to have integrity, it must be bound to its particular and unique objects of concern. And yet, the nonfoundational approach is quite clearly beholden, if not governed by, the cult of the current. Instead of offering an epistemological theory that derives from specifically Christian convictions, Thiel is happy to reiterate the conclusions of atheists like Richard Rorty. While he insists this love/hate relationship with current trends is just part of the dialectical paradox of nonfoundationalism (79-80), I am dubious that nonfoundationalists are successful in their putative desire to shape extrabiblical theory with specifically biblical categories (86).⁷ At the very least, the Christian should recognize that the conservative bravado of nonfoundational theology owes much more to non-Christian ways of thinking than its advocates are likely to admit.

Most dangerous from a Christian point of view is a possible propensity toward relativism and even epistemological nihilism in this approach.⁸ Substantiating this charge would require more space than we have here. So I point only to one response by Thiel. When he addresses this criticism, instead of dealing with it head-on, he dismisses it in *ad hominem* fashion as a manifestation of the "Cartesian anxiety" of foundationalists (81, 93). But of course we're not interested in the psychological motivations for the accusation that nonfoundationalism is relativistic. We're interested in whether or not this accusation is *true*. We leave the conclusion to this matter as homework for the reader.

Postfoundationalism

Other contemporary theories seek to re-construe or redefine rationality by emphasizing social and linguistic context, and by considering the role of nonrational or suprarational factors in rationality. These proposals often have elements in common with both foundationalism and nonfoundationalism. They trade under different names, such as *holistic* epistemology⁹ and *postfoundationalism*.¹⁰ We

⁷We should note that Hans Frei may use the term "foundations" more loosely than even Thiel. When Frei objects to foundations, he is usually referring to the propensity among many theologians to submit theological claims to general, even purportedly universal criteria of meaning and reasonableness. See in particular his *Types of Christian Theology*, ed. by George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), ch. 2 - 5.

⁸Of course I'm not contending that such Christian theologians have relativistic or nihilistic intentions. I am merely suggesting that these are likely to follow from the premises they offer.

⁹For example, Harold I. Brown, *Rationality* (London: Routledge, 1988).

could include a panoply of proposals under postfoundationalism. At their best, they highlight aspects of human ways of knowing which tended to get short shrift when classical foundationalism ruled the roost. Of particular significance in these theories is their emphasis on the roles which tacit, non-explicit, and background beliefs play in knowledge and rationality.

Since there is such variety in this category, I can only recommend some works which I think are promising, and of particular interest to the theologically concerned. One is the work of the late philosopher of science Michael Polanyi, particularly *Personal Knowledge*¹¹ and *Science, Faith, and Society*.¹² If the reader is interested in the current debates over rationality, she should not let the fact that Polanyi is a philosopher of science be a deterrent. His work is quite accessible, and what it lacks in precision, it makes up for in insight.

In a more theological vein, I would include some of the offerings by Princeton Theological Seminary professors. Most obviously is the work of Wentzel van Huyssteen, for example, *Theology and the Justification of Faith*.¹³ I also think Diogenes Allen's *The Reasonableness of Faith* and James Loder and Jim Neidhardt's *The Knight's Move*¹⁴ could be fairly characterized as postfoundational (whether or not they would accept the label is another matter). The differences between these proposals reminds one of the broadness of the word postfoundationalism. Again there is ambiguity in the term. They are really post *classical* foundational, since few deny that we do continue to hold some beliefs basically. But all point out the ways in which a component of trust or faith is essential to any realistic theory of rationality and knowledge. This is a crucial insight for the Christian, who might be plagued with the suspicion that Christian belief is epistemically sub-standard since it always has a "fiduciary component." These theories might serve as a helpful inoculation against this suspicion.

Coherentism

Other theorists point to *coherence* among beliefs as a better criterion than foundationalism. In fact, in analytical philosophical circles, coherentism is usually considered the other main alternative beside foundationalism. In a coherence theory, beliefs derive their justification from their consistency with other beliefs in one's noetic structure. While coherence is often a necessary component in foundationalist schemes, it is rarely sufficient for some belief to be rational. And clearly, if a rational belief is to enjoy some correlation to truth and knowledge, coherence alone just doesn't cut it. After all, institutions are filled with individuals who possess elaborately constructed and consistent beliefs, many of which bear little resemblance to reality. Two beliefs may be logically contradictory, and still

be members of different sets of beliefs which are perfectly self-consistent. But obviously both can't be true. If coherence is all that's needed for a belief to be rational, being rational is a fairly modest undertaking.

In this scheme, rational beliefs become detached from their relation to truth and knowledge, for clearly coherence among beliefs is insufficient to make them true. To see this, take any belief which is most likely false, such as the claim that *Santa Claus lives at the North Pole*. How many other beliefs which cohere with this claim are sufficient to make it count as knowledge? How many are sufficient to make it true? Obviously, the answer is *none*. Any non-contradictory belief is capable of being clustered with a bunch of beliefs which are consistent with it, without it ever attaining the status of truth or knowledge. In the same way, any theory of rationality which wants to be at all tethered to knowledge and truth will recognize the inadequacy of coherence as a sole criterion. Why be concerned about the rationality of some belief, if we have given up concern for knowledge and truth? If these latter commitments drop out of the picture, what dishonor comes with holding an *irrational* belief?

Naturalized Epistemology

Others seek to hand over epistemology to psychology or biology, dissolving philosophical questions into a completely *naturalized epistemology*, which investigates the way evolutionary development impinges on our ways of knowing. W. v. O. Quine may have helped start this movement, which is now a burgeoning field. While this trend in its most extreme form is reductionist, some aspects of naturalized epistemology are quite helpful. It has pointed to the ways in which epistemology of the classical foundationalist variety tended to focus on highly abstract *a priori* questions of rational justification, with little concern for how human persons as natural creatures come to know. We need an epistemology which is appropriate for humans, not logic machines. While human beings use logic, discursive reasoning and the like, how we come to know is clearly not reducible to these components. The questions of the classical foundationalist fail to account for our actual noetic faculties as functions of complex and subtle organisms.

Naturalized epistemology has also helped to recover an important distinction between what is called *internalism* and *externalism*. Classical foundationalism is an example of internalism; so as long as it was the prevalent metaepistemological option, this distinction was not crucial. But the turn toward a consideration of our belief-producing faculties and away from classical foundationalism has made it important. Most simply, internalism has to do with those components, such as explicit beliefs, which are *accessible* to the individual knower. Like Descartes in his *Meditations*, through introspection I can evaluate many of my beliefs, and may even be able to discern which beliefs are based on others, which are basic, self-evident, incorrigible, non-basic, and the like. These are all *internal* considerations, and accord very well with the subjectivist turn of modern epistemology.

¹⁰I have adopted this term from Wentzel van Huyssteen.

¹¹(Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958).

¹²(Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1946).

¹³(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1989).

¹⁴(Colorado Springs: Helmer & Howard, 1992).

Externalism, on the other hand, focuses on the fact that there are at least some components to rationality and knowledge which are not directly accessible to the knower, and so are not susceptible to this sort of introspective evaluation. The function of my belief-producing faculties might be one such component. Even if I considered all factors I have access to in assessing some belief, if the faculty that produced that belief is faulty in some significant way, that belief could be unwarranted and irrational. Moreover, I have to use such faculties in order to begin to evaluate whether or not they are functioning properly. Any attempt to establish or ground their accuracy will inevitably require that I use them. So any such effort to justify external components internally will be circular. The externalist intuition insists that one part of the task of determining whether a belief is rational, warranted, or suffices for knowledge, will depend on the status of things like the faculties which produce that belief.¹⁵ And while many naturalized epistemologies are evolutionary in a metaphysically naturalistic sense, and so intrinsically non-Christian, this is not an essential component to externalism. A focus on external factors in the production of beliefs should be of general concern to all epistemology, naturalistic or otherwise.

Moreover, the recent emergence of externalist considerations makes questions about the *design* of belief-producing faculties very important for epistemology, and suggests some ways in which specifically-Christian claims might have import for epistemology. This points toward possibilities of applying Christian beliefs to epistemology, and actually delivering on some of the nonfoundationalist rhetoric about the *specificity* of Christian beliefs. But to date, in contrast to some moderate foundationalists like Alvin Plantinga,¹⁶ none of the so-called nonfoundational theologians have proposed such theories.

Weak Foundationalism

While the reasons for rejecting classical foundationalism mentioned so far have been somewhat general and philosophical, others have also noted that classical foundationalism is clearly destructive to Christian belief and its dependence on divine revelation. Perhaps the Christian would be obliged to reject classical foundationalism for such reasons even if it were philosophically adequate for the non-Christian, although few modern theologians have exhibited such moral courage (Barth might be an exception.) Most have sought either to accommodate or assimilate classical foundationalist criteria into Christian theology itself.

¹⁵See Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 5-6.

¹⁶Perhaps the best recent example of this is Plantinga's *Warrant and Proper Function*. See also the essays in *Faith and Rationality*, and the collection of essays written in response to Plantinga and Reformed Epistemology, *Rational Faith: Catholic Responses to Reformed Epistemology*, ed. by Linda Zagzebski (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993).

Some who have rejected classical foundationalism for philosophical reasons, *and* because it is destructive to Christian belief, nevertheless see generic foundationalism as the most promising way to proceed. These individuals (such as, among others, Alvin Plantinga, William Alston, J.P. Moreland, maybe Nicholas Wolterstorff and others) work toward devising criteria which will exclude bad beliefs, but allow some Christian beliefs to be rational in certain circumstances. These theorists do not dismiss altogether the legitimacy of criteria for delimiting basic and non-basic beliefs, and for determining which beliefs are properly held as basic. Neither do they deny that we may have some self-evident, certain, or incorrigible beliefs. Rather, they object to the tight-fistedness of classical foundationalists, who unnecessarily restrict proper basicity to a very limited set of beliefs. They suggest that some beliefs, such as the existence of God, may be properly basic for some people in some circumstances. If our belief-producing faculties are designed by God, then surely it is possible that they are so constructed that, when working properly (say, in a sanctified state), there could be circumstances in which belief in God's existence or benevolence could be warranted, without being based on other beliefs. Perhaps there are some experiential grounds, such as hearing the gospel proclaimed, gazing at the starry heavens above, or hearing Pavarotti sing, which are designed to produce such beliefs. At the very least, we should note that Christian history is saturated with the conviction that we are obliged to base our beliefs (which motivate and inform our actions) on certain things, and not on others. The metaphor of *foundation* seems more appropriate to this conviction than *web*.

III. The Relevance of the Debate for Christians

While this may all be interesting, some may question how germane this discussion is for Christian thought and life. So we should note some reasons the foundationalism/antifoundationalism debate has relevance for the Christian.

First, the collapse of classical foundationalism is a welcomed development insofar as it has been a ubiquitous enemy to Christian belief in the West for the last few centuries. This fact alters the status of Christian belief relative to the intellectual culture. Conventional objections which depend on classical foundationalism may no longer be obstacles. If the Christian ignores this, he or she will be unaware of this shift, and of the opportunities it affords us, particularly in apologetics. The apologist need not feel intimidated by the fact that some of his or her arguments employ premises which are not universally shared. This might be a vice under classical foundationalism. But surely every argument need not employ universal premises. After all, what arguments for anything (including classical foundationalism) enjoy such premises?

Second, because epistemological theory is in such flux, now is the time to propose arguments which are specifically Christian, or at least hospitable to Christian beliefs. The ability to get a hearing now for such things is

far greater (even if it is still hostile) than it was in the past. If another skeptic-satisfying philosophical orthodoxy (like classical foundationalism) gains stature and acceptability, such arguments are more likely to fall on deaf ears.

Third, Christians are committed to *truth* and *rationality* properly defined. Some non- and anti-foundationalist proposals are clearly relativist and anti-realist. This is true of even some supposedly Christian proposals. On these terms, Christian beliefs may be let back into the ring, because, well, "If every belief is irrational, why exclude Christian ones?" This sort of *tu quoque* reasoning is not a good thing for Christians who insist they hold beliefs which are both rational and true.

Fourth, there is significant confusion over the very meaning of the word "foundationalism." Imprecision breeds muddled thinking. If the collapse of the search for certainty in all our beliefs leads some in Christian circles to reject foundationalism in general, they will be unaware of the broad epistemological options available to them. Being a part of the debate could lead to greater clarity (that is, if the right people enter the debate). At the very least, theologians who persist in using philosophical terms such as "foundationalism" should at least read what some *Christian* philosophers are saying about epistemology. It is a telling irony that nonfoundationalists, who stridently insist upon the specificity of Christian beliefs, evince little exposure to Christian philosophy. And yet they take their cue from philosophers who are not hospitable to Christian commitments. I am convinced that the lack of cross-fertilization between Christian theology and philosophy is one significant reason for the confusion in theological circles over foundationalism.

Of course, Christians are not obligated to be at the beck and call of every new epistemological theory that comes up the pike. But it strengthens the perceived reasonableness of Christian beliefs if one can show the inadequacy of criteria which exclude such beliefs from consideration. Also, we have a stake in defeating arguments for relativism and anti-realism that would be destructive, not just to Christian beliefs specifically, but to the stability of our society and culture as well. Finally, opportunities to apply Christian beliefs in a theoretical field such as epistemology can function as an indirect apologetic for the truth and fruitfulness of Christian belief. For all these reasons, I contend that Christians should seek to understand and participate in the contemporary debate over the so-called "demise of foundationalism."

**A very popular error:
having the courage of
one's convictions; rather
it is a matter of having
the courage for an attack
on one's convictions.**

Nietzsche

Book Reviews

The Church of the Ancient Councils: The Disciplinary Work of the First Four Ancient Councils

- by Archbishop Peter (L'Huillier), published by St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 1996. xii, 328 pages, index. Paperback, \$19.95.

reviewed by Greg Faulkner

Over twenty years ago Archbishop Peter (L'Huillier) completed his doctoral thesis in Canon Law for the Theological Academy of Moscow. It has just now been published in its English translation. While some of us might think a commentary on the *disciplinary*, not the theological, work of the first four Ecumenical Councils could only prove to be yet another chokingly dry historical tome to sit in the darker caverns of Speer/Luce Library, that is not necessarily so. Granted *The Church of the Ancient Councils* will not be a book that most of us will take up and read from cover to cover; nevertheless Archbishop Peter has given us a wonderfully helpful text which considers each of the disciplinary canons of Nicaea I (325), Constantinople I (381), Ephesus (431), and Chalcedon (451). This is not the controversies of Christology and Pneumatology, but rather what it means to be a bishop, how are the lapsed to be treated, what time of the year is the Lord's Resurrection to be celebrated, and the requirements for eucharistic fellowship. The goal of this work is "to determine the exact meaning of each canon" (7). After each canon is rendered, L'Huillier gives a clear and informative commentary on the historical background of the canon showing its' relationship with other such disciplinary concerns cited in the original languages. A full apparatus accompanies the text in endnotes to aid the reader in further research and each section is introduced with a brief but extremely clear essay on what led up to and occurred at each council.

It is quite easy to assume that the disciplinary or ecclesiastical dimensions of the four great councils might appear to have little to do with those of us in the Western Church, especially within the Protestant world. However, some of these canons have far reaching ecumenical consequences; for example Canon 7 of Ephesus states that "no one is permitted to produce, to edit, or to compose another faith than that set out . . . in Nicea [*sic*]." (157) Clearly, this has vast implications for the matter of the *filioque* and continues to be a point of contention between the Western and Eastern churches. While there has been some movement toward a Latin reworking of Trinitarian theology in a more Eastern style, there is *no* discussion in the West of dropping the *filioque* all together. And according to the Third Ecumenical Council the creedal statements and the faith expressed therein cannot be modulated without consent of the universal Church--a claim that is taken with utmost seriousness by the Eastern churches.

For another example, Canon 15 of Chalcedon states, in part, that "[a] woman must not be ordained deacon before the age of 40 and that after a careful inquiry." While the

question of women's ordination is probably not in question, but that there is some witness from the ancient councils concerning the ministry of women is a great sign of hope for many in the Roman Catholic world and for others in the East concerned with rehabilitating the diaconal ministry of women. While this canon deals with the diaconate and not the presbyterate it does, of course, throw light on our history of which only some of us might be aware. And this is one of the great strengths of having such an easily accessible volume that not only gives us the canons of the councils, but opens them to us with care and clarity.

Scholars in the field will find this work a beneficial guide and aid, and those just beginning graduate studies will find, with the help of the thorough index, a resource that can provide insight into the life of the larger Church as it was lived for centuries.

**Rome, Constantinople, Moscow:
Historical and Theological Studies**

- by John Meyendorff, published by St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 1996. 191 pages, index. Paperback, \$10.95.

reviewed by Greg Faulkner

Just over four years ago Father John Meyendorff, Dean of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary, went to sleep in the Lord. This gathering of essays is the first posthumous work published by this illustrious historian and theologian. If any one word could be used to capture the general theme of this book it would have to be *authority*. Meyendorff addresses in these eleven occasional pieces questions of ecclesiology and church authority of the Latin Church and the Eastern Orthodox world, which by the end of the tenth century included Russia.

The initial essay, "Rome and Constantinople" (7-28), sets forth the position that is evident throughout the rest of the work: differences of self-understanding in both the Western and Eastern church as well as the East's conception of Rome's authority led to varying approaches to ecclesiology, which served as the breach that would ultimately end in the Great Schism of 1054. Unlike the ecclesiology of Roman Catholicism which holds that the Pope is the supreme earthly head of the universal Church, the East developed (at least by the fourth century) the conciliar notion in which the head of each local church shared responsibility for right belief and right practice. This Eastern view led to the notion of *pentarchy* whereby the five great sees of Christendom--Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople and Jerusalem--were given the greatest honor and privileged as the chief voiceplaces of the ecumenical Church (87-92).

Meyendorff is clearly speaking as an Orthodox who sees the Latin ecclesiology as misguided, yet he is able to put forth the Eastern position with nuance and never seems to tire of demonstrating the shortcomings of the East's own position, as well as noting times when the Eastern approach was misused by its own. However, it is also clear that he is drawing from certain sources to which he returns throughout this collection of essays. One can only assume that he does so because as a historian he judges these certain events and

documents as being pivotal to the discussion and descriptive of the events themselves. Meyendorff never claims that the pentarchy of the Eastern church was essential to ecclesiology. Rather pentarchy was a key factor in the rise of the ecumenical council, since each of the five great sees had to be represented to make a Church council truly ecumenical, that is, universal. In summarizing the ecclesiological position of the nineteenth century philosopher Khomiakov, Meyendorff states how conciliarity functions as a representative ecclesiology by which all the faithful are involved: "in Orthodoxy, the responsible guardian of the true faith is not any visible head or institution, but 'the people of God,' i.e., the whole church, including clergy and laity" (186). It is this notion of conciliarity, and the autonomy of each regional (local) church, which continues to make Orthodoxy appealing to some Protestants who cannot accept the primacy of the Pope, but who are seeking participation in the ancient tradition of the Church. According to our author the Eastern Church has always recognized the authority of the local church. While this does not admit to a congregational polity, it certainly underscores the practice, not just the idea, of church authority rising up from the region and being administered from nearby rather than from far away. With many of these essays, Meyendorff, in this writer's opinion, gives Protestants another avenue of beneficial dialogue and research into the questions of ecclesiology and church authority and no doubt some of us will find them helpful in both our studies and our own ecclesial contexts.

Perhaps one of the most provocative ideas mentioned by Father Meyendorff is the Eastern view of Peter in regard to ecclesial authority. Meyendorff states that over and against papal supremacy the East understands Peter as being represented by *all* bishops and that with the episcopal office comes the ministry of teaching and guarding the Faith which was entrusted to Peter by the Lord. Peter cannot be understood as simply the property of Rome since his ministry can surely be claimed as well by both Jerusalem and Antioch (Acts 1-10, 15). "Whenever, the Byzantines discussed directly the succession of Peter in the Church, they emphasized the *universal* ministry of all the apostles, including Peter; the distinctive, and always *local* and sacramental ministry of the bishops, inseparable from each bishop's community; the fact that Rome cannot claim the succession of Peter for itself alone, and that such a succession, in Rome as elsewhere, is conditioned by the confession of Peter's faith; and finally that every bishop orthodox in faith, possessed 'the power of the key' conferred by Christ to Peter" (103). While Meyendorff obviously sees this view of Peter as Biblical and patristic, and therefore holding great significance for a proper ecclesiology, he again demonstrates his breadth of knowledge and ecumenical openness when he states that this view of Petrine ministry has also been present in the West as shown by the Dominican, Yves Congar (cf. 97-104, also 7-28).

Meyendorff further explicates the differences of Western and Eastern ways of doing theology by turning his attention on the Medieval period with his informative, but too brief essay: "Theology in the Thirteenth Century: Methodological Contrasts" (73-86). The rise of the university in the early 1200's along with the growth of the

religious orders created in the West an approach that was professionally sophisticated and intellectually Scholastic in mind-set. During the same period, the East was experiencing the emergence of a new monastic resurgence which had a strong effect on Eastern theology. (The incredibly powerful influence of the monastic tradition on Orthodox theology marks many of these pieces, but space does not permit treating this and related topics.) As the new systematic approach to theology in Western Scholasticism met the experiential-centered, mystical theology then at its apex in the East, the two sides found themselves often unable to understand even the theological language being used by the other. In the end, the Easterners generally either accepted Latin theological concepts with only vague notions of its full meaning or rejected it with defensive responses. The concerns raised during these discussions between the Latins and Orthodox most often dealt with the *filioque* and, the understandings of the Trinity, the proper practice of the Eucharist, the doctrine of purgatory and the authority of the Pope. (It is perhaps important to note that each of these areas has taken the limelight in the modern ecumenical dialogues and continues to provide significant material for on-going conversations.) The differences in theological methodology of the thirteenth century which Meyendorff analyzes continues to bear fruit in our own day, and regrettably, it is often the fruit of confusion and Westernizing.

Realizing that the divide between the Eastern and Western branches of the Church began earlier rather than later, Meyendorff is also well aware of those great figures that attempted to bridge the ever-increasing gap. "An Early Medieval Bridge-Builders: Remarks on Eastern Patristic Thought in John Scot Eriugena" is a very helpful introduction to the salient features of this ninth-century theologian which clearly demonstrates that the Western adherence to Augustinianism was in no way as monolithic as we would sometimes like to think. Eriugena not only worked to throw Eastern light upon the darkened West of the middle ages by translating Greek texts into Latin (most notably the *corpus* of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite), but by also utilizing a wide range of the Eastern fathers in the hope of answering the theological problems of his day. This highly stimulating and thought-provoking essay stretches the Western theological mind and asks for reconsiderations of formative theological paradigms in regard to anthropology, sin and redemption.

Father Meyendorff investigates more thoroughly the formal attempt of union among the West and East in posing the question: "Was There an Encounter between East and West at Florence?" (87-111). This essay details the movement toward the council of Ferrara-Florence held in the later first half of the fifteenth century and what did, and perhaps more importantly, what did not happen at this assembly. Poignantly and carefully our author conveys what the West lost spiritually in being cut off from the East and implies that many of the religious orders and the proto-Protestant groups would have found something of a spiritual home in Orthodoxy if only they had known the patristic sources and the witness of the living Orthodox church of the East. Oddly, Meyendorff does not mention the early Lutheran contacts with the Greek Church and that such exposure did not bring a Lutheran-Orthodox union. Nonetheless, he is quick to put forth the weaknesses of the Easterners when faced with Western Christianity at the Council of Florence. "Equally tragic was the strictly defensive, uninformed and somewhat provincial attitude of the Eastern churchmen who came to Ferrara-Florence: hard-pressed by their own concerns, they were obviously incapable of understanding the true realities of Western Christendom" (102).

A highly interesting essay entitled "From Byzantium to Russia: Religious and Cultural Legacy" (113-130) delineates

the three aspects that characterized Byzantine culture, namely "the Roman political legacy, the Greek language and Orthodox Christianity," and how each of these translated into the soil of the North (117). Meyendorff makes the case that more than anything what Russia was given by the missionaries Cyril and Methodius was the Christian Faith. Unlike the West where Latin ruled the day in both ecclesial and political affairs, the Greek missionaries to Russia immediately translated the Scriptures, the Liturgy and quite an assortment of spiritual and theological texts into Slavonic which soon gave rise to a Slavic Christian tradition with its own flavor though "some of the theological sophistication was lost in the translation" (121). This also meant that the clergy and scholars of the new Christian nation did not need to learn Greek or Latin to carry on theological or philosophical discourse. Meyendorff asserts that part of the purpose of this immediate translation from Greek to Slavonic was to hand on the Christian tradition *without* handing on the Classical tradition of either Athens or Rome, a move accomplished by many Byzantine theologians and clerics who had little regard for Hellenic philosophy beyond its earlier "baptism" by the Fathers of the Councils (119-121; cf also 29-38). Clearly, this was another defensive move by the East against the Medieval Roman Church and its emerging Scholasticism. One wonders what would have happened if the Easterners would have become more energetic in their conversation with the West and attempted a more extensive search into the philosophical and theological events of the Middle Ages. Would Hellenic philosophy have perhaps been a bridge that was too readily dismissed in fear by the East? It is disappointing that Father Meyendorff does not raise the question; but can we in the twenty-first century, Western, Protestant milieu fail to search out this question?

Whatever the answer to these questions the final essay of the book, "Visions of the Church: Russian Theological Thought in Modern Times" (183-191) treats the influx of Western thought with the reforms of Peter I and how this secularizing program gave rise to renewed Orthodox theological and philosophical vigor throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (183-191). The watershed of Christianity coming to Russia in 987 with the profuse cultural response in art, literature, architecture and spirituality was slowly marginalized with the growing force of the Muscovite power. With Peter I (Peter the Great) came reforms that further secularized the Christianity of Russia, yet "the Christian faith remained at the very center of Russian cultural consciousness. What is extraordinary and truly remarkable is that in the nineteenth century Russia produced a literature which, if considered as a whole, is undoubtedly the most 'Christian' among European literatures of the period. . . . That literature has its ultimate roots in the baptism of St. Vladimir in 987-988" (129-130). The further development of the theological and philosophical thought in Russia in the last two hundred years completes the pieces concerned with Orthodox Russia; though this discussion gives little more than a sketch of modern Russian theology.

The majority of *Rome, Constantinople, Moscow* deals, as this review, with the relationship between the Latin and Eastern churches and the influence of the Great Church of Constantinople on Slavic Christianity primarily with reference to ecclesiological questions. However, two essays that do not fit these categories deal with Orthodox theology; they are two of the best presentations in the collection and are well worth the reading. It is with these two theological pieces that Meyendorff's historical erudition and theological acumen are best displayed.

In the first of these two essays, "New Life in Christ: Salvation in Orthodox Theology" (149-168), the author

presents with precision the supposed misunderstanding of original sin by the Augustinian tradition; an error he explains is due to mistranslations in the Latin text. Meyendorff's able recounting of the theocentric anthropology and the soteriology that is its counterpart is a strong indicator of how far the West is from its Eastern origins. Meyendorff shows in this treatise, as with the greater part of the entire book, that Western theologians might often speak of Augustine, Ambrose, Anselm and Aquinas--to say nothing of Calvin and Barth, Moltmann and Pannenberg, Schüssler-Fiorenza and MacFague--but rarely will discuss with any extensiveness Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Cyril, Maximus, or John Damascene. While this entire essay is challenging and enlightening it would have benefited from further explication; nonetheless it is well-worth reading and pondering for it raises critical issues for thinking about Christology and soteriology. The reader can find further, more in-depth discussions by turning to Meyendorff's *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (3rd ed.; New York: Fordham University, 1987) and his *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1975).

No less provocative is the other theological essay addressing the topic: "The Christian Gospel and Social Responsibility" (169-182). Father Meyendorff shows his balanced and nuanced approach is not only focused at the drawbacks in the West, but that he is well aware of the East's shortcomings as well. "Historically, Orthodox Christians frequently looked for substitutes for [the] initial and basic criterion [for proper social responsibility]. The Byzantine Empire provided one; nationalism later presented another. But these historical and spiritual mistakes were ultimately recognized as such. They should not, in any case, justify similar substitutions today" (182). In the end, however, one is

left wondering if the often politically and socially oppressed situation that much of the Orthodox faced for the greater part of this millennium is valid grounds for failing to take their social responsibility with greater enthusiasm. Meyendorff claims that eschatology is the proper incentive for social action, yet often it has been overly zealous eschatological (and mystical) visions that have in fact kept Eastern Orthodox Christians from addressing more temporal concerns.

Though this book will be read with profit by experts in the field, it can also serve as an introduction into these topics; but as a guide for the novice it will require some patience. One of the most important aspects of Meyendorff's most recent book is that it challenges non-Orthodox readers to realize what they have lost. Technically there are a few typographical slips and the ever vacillating spelling of Nicaea/Nicea. Beyond this, Meyendorff's lucid writing makes the reading easy to follow, even in the deep waters of fifth century Christology. Only two of the eleven essays here are published for the first time and there is overlap between several of them (primarily between the seventh and eighth, and to a lesser degree between the second and third as well as the fifth and sixth). That notwithstanding, having them gathered in this handy and inexpensive edition offers the thought of not only one of the great thinkers of Eastern Orthodox in this century, but also one of the great teachers for the entire twentieth century Church. *Rome, Constantinople, Moscow: Historical and Theological Studies* offers some of the significant occasional pieces from Father John's last work before his untimely death in the summer of 1992. It is a tribute to him that his work continues to answer as well as raise important questions as the Church Universal faces the challenges of the next millennium still a Church divided East and West.

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